

Amy Walton

"Susan"

Chapter One.

"My Aunt Enticknapp."

"So there ain't no idea, then, of takin' Miss Susan?"

"No, indeed! My mistress will have enough on her hands as it is, what with the journey, and poor Master Freddie such a care an' all, an' so helpless. I don't deny I've a sinkin' myself when I think of it; but if it's to do the poor child good, I'm not the one to stand in his way."

"Where's she to stay, then, while you're all away?"

"With an aunt of Missis' at Ramsgate. An old lady by what I hear."

"Por little thing!"

Susan heard all this; for, though she was snugly curled up in her little bed at the other end of the room, she was not asleep. Now and then she opened her eyes drowsily and peeped from the bed-clothes, which nearly covered her round face, at Nurse and Maria bending over their work by the fire. There was only one candle on the table, and they poked their heads so near the flame as they talked that she wondered the caps did not catch light, particularly Maria's, which was very high and fussy in front. Susan began to count the narrow escapes she had, but before she had got far she became so interested in the conversation that she gave it up.

Not that they said anything at all new to her, for it had been settled long ago, and her mother often talked about it. Susan knew it all as well as possible. How the doctor had said that Freddie, her elder brother, who was always ill and weakly, must now be taken out of England to a warm climate for the winter months. She had heard her mother say what a long journey it would be, how much it would cost, how difficult it was to leave London; and yet it was the only chance for Freddie, and so it must be done. She knew that very soon they were to start, and

Nurse was to go too; but she herself was to be left behind, with an old lady she had never seen, all the time they were gone.

But, although she knew all this she had not felt that it was a thing to dread, or that she was much to be pitied; she had even looked forward to it with a sort of pleased wonder about all the new things she should see and do, for this old lady lived by the sea-side, and Susan had never been there. She had seen it in pictures and read of it in story-books, and her mother had told her of many pleasures she would find which were not to be had anywhere else. When she thought of it, therefore, it was of some unknown but very agreeable place where she would dig in the sand and perhaps bathe in the sea, and pick up beautiful shells for Freddie and herself.

To-night, however, for the first time, as she listened to Nurse and Maria mumbling over their work in the half-light, she began to think of it differently, and even to be a little alarmed; so that when Maria said, "Por little thing!" with such a broad accent of pity, Susan felt sorry too. She *was* a poor little thing, no doubt, to be left behind; and then there was another matter she had not thought of much—the old lady. "My Aunt Enticknapp," her mother always called her; a difficult and ugly name to begin with, and very hard to pronounce. Would she be pleasant? or would she be cross and full of corners like her name? Whatever she was, she was a perfect stranger, and Susan felt sure she should not want to stay with her all the winter. It was certainly a hard case, and the more she considered it the less she liked it. She wondered if Nurse and Maria would say anything more, but soon the little clock on the mantelpiece struck ten, they put away their work and went down to supper. Then Susan fixed her round brown eyes on the glowing fire. "Por little thing!" someone seemed to go on saying over and over again, each time more slowly. At last it got very slow indeed: "Por—little—" and while she waited for it to say "thing," she fell asleep.

But she remembered it all directly she woke the next morning, and made up her mind that she must find out more about Aunt Enticknapp than she had yet done. Amongst other things she must know her Christian name. It would not be very easy, because just now everyone in the house, and her mother above all, seemed to have so much to think of that they had no time to answer questions properly. Susan had never been encouraged to ask questions, and it would be more than usually difficult at present, for there was a mysterious bustle going on all over the house, and nothing was just as usual. She constantly found strange boxes and packages in different

rooms, with her mother and nurse in anxious consultation over them, and she was allowed to go where she liked and do as she liked, provided only that she did not get in the way or give trouble; above all, she knew she must not ask many questions, or say "why" often, for that worried people more than anything. The governess, who came every day to teach Susan and Freddie, had given them her last lesson yesterday, and said "good-bye;" she was not coming again, she told them, for the whole winter. In this state of things the only person in the house who seemed always good-tempered and ready to talk was Maria, the nursery-maid—perhaps she had not so much on her mind. It was not, however, at all satisfactory to make inquiries of Maria, for, with the best will in the world, and an eager desire to please, she was rather stupid, and could seldom give any answer worth having.

So Susan had little hope of learning much about Aunt Enticknapp, and yet the more she thought of it the more she felt she must try to do so—even if she had to ask her mother, which she was afraid to do, for Mother was always so occupied and anxious about Freddie that Susan's wants and wonders had to give way, or be kept to herself, and this she thought quite natural because Freddie was ill.

After breakfast she took a doll, a small work-box, and a tattered book, and settled herself quietly in her favourite corner; this was in Freddie's room, between the back of his couch and the wall, and, though rather dark, very snug and private, and not too retired for her to see all that went on. From here she could watch her mother as she came in and out, and judge when it would be best to speak to her. Not yet evidently. Mother's face looked full of worry and business this morning, and if she sat down for one minute a maid-servant would be sure to appear with, "If you please, ma'am," and then she would have to go away again. Susan sighed as she pushed her sticky needle in and out the doll's frock she was making. Her mind was full of Aunt Enticknapp; if she was Mother's aunt she must, of course, be very very old. Very old ladies always looked cross, and were nearly always deaf. Ought she to call her "aunt" when she spoke to her? What was her other name? Perhaps Freddie could tell her that, at any rate! She stood up and looked at him over the back of the sofa—there he was, reading as usual, with a frown on his white forehead, and all his thick black hair pushed up by his impatient hand. Freddie was ten, two years older than Susan; he had never been able to run about and play like other boys, and her earliest recollection of him was that he was always lying on his back, and always reading. The books he

liked best were those that had plenty of fighting and hunting and hardships in them. He was reading now a tale of the Coral Islands, and she knew quite well that he would not like to be disturbed. He was not always good-tempered, but Mother had told Susan that she ought to be patient with him because he was so often in pain. She stood there with her doll under her arm staring thoughtfully at him, and at last he turned a page.

"Freddie!" she said very quickly, so that he might not have time to get interested again. "What do you think I ought to call her?"

Freddie turned his great black eyes upon her with a puzzled and rather vexed look in them; it was a long way from the Coral Islands to Susan. But she stood expecting an answer, and he said at last with an impatient glance at the doll:

"Call her! Oh, call her what you like!"

Susan saw his mistake at once.

"Oh, I don't mean the doll!" she said in a great hurry. "I mean Aunt—Aunt—Emptycap."

Freddie's attention was caught at last. He put the book down on his knees.

"Aunt *who*?" he said with real interest in his voice.

Susan knew he was going to laugh at her, and this she never liked.

"You know who I mean," she said, "it's not *quite* the name, but it sounds like that. I want to know if I ought to call her 'Aunt.'"

Freddie's eyes twinkled, though his face was quite grave:

"I should just take care of one thing if I were you," he said; "and that is, not to say her name wrong."

"Why?" asked Susan.

"Because nothing makes old ladies so angry as that. Why, if you were to walk in and say, 'How do you do, Aunt Emptycap?' it might make her cross all the time you stay."

"Might it really?" said Susan. She felt a little doubtful whether Freddie was to be trusted, and yet he spoke as if he knew. It was something, however, to have made him talk about it at all.

"She's got another name, I suppose," she continued; "something easier to say. I shall call her that, and then she couldn't be angry."

"Oh, yes, she could," said Freddie quickly; "she would think that rude, because she's Mother's aunt, you know, our *great* aunt."

"Do you suppose she's very old?" asked Susan, putting the next question that had filled her mind.

"Very," said Freddie; "and as for crossness!" He lifted up his eyes and hands without finishing the sentence.

Susan felt discouraged, though she had a feeling that Freddie was "making up." Still, what he said was so like what she thought of the matter herself that it had a great effect upon her.

"If you like," continued Freddie graciously, "I'll tell you just what I think she'll be like."

Susan nodded, though she inwardly dreaded the description.

"You know," began Freddie, opening his large eyes very wide, "that picture of old Mother Holle in Grimm?"

Susan knew it very well, for it always made her uncomfortable to look at it, and she thought of it sometimes at night.

"Aunt Enticknapp is something like that," he went on, speaking with relish in a low tone, "only uglier. With a hookier nose, and bigger eyebrows, and a hump on her back. She talks in a croaky sort of voice like a frog, and she takes snuff, and carries a black stick with a silver top."

Susan stared at her brother without speaking, and clutched her doll more tightly to her chest; but though this terrible picture really alarmed her, she had a proud spirit, and was not going to let him know it.

"You don't suppose I believe that," she said scornfully; "that's only like a fairy old woman."

"You just wait," said Freddie solemnly, "till you get down there and see her."

Just then Maria came into the room with her bonnet on. Miss Susan was to go out with her, she said, and do some shopping

for Nurse, and she must come and be dressed at once. Susan collected her property and marched out of the room, holding her head very high to show Freddie that she did not care for what he had said; but, as soon as she was alone with Maria, she thought of it with a very heavy mind.

Late in the afternoon of that same day she was sitting in the drawing-room window seat threading beads, when Mother's great friend came to pay a visit. Susan knew her very well. She was a lady who lived near, and often went out with Mother when she had to choose a new bonnet or do shopping. Her name was Mrs Millet; but Mother always called her "dear" or "Emily." Susan did not like her much; so she remained quietly in her corner, and hoped she would not be called out to say "How do you do?" It was a snug corner almost hidden by the window curtain, and Mother had perhaps forgotten she was in the room at all. At any rate no notice was taken of her, and she went on happily with her work, but presently something in the conversation caught her attention.

"So you really go on Tuesday, dear?" said Mrs Millet with a sigh.

"Yes," said Mrs Ingram; "it's a great undertaking."

"It is, *indeed*," agreed Mrs Millet in a deeply sympathetic tone. Then, catching a glimpse of herself in a glass opposite, she patted her bonnet-strings, looked more cheerful, and added, "And how about Susan?"

"She goes to Ramsgate on Monday to my Aunt Enticknapp."

"Ah," said Mrs Millet. "Quite satisfactory, I suppose?"

"Perfectly. I heard this morning. I feared she might not have room because of those Bahia girls, you know."

"Exactly," replied Mrs Millet. "Quite *desirable*, I suppose?"

"Quite. Susan, you can go upstairs now. It's nearly tea-time. Clear those things away, and shut the door softly."

Deeply disappointed, for she felt she had been on the very edge of hearing something about Aunt Enticknapp, Susan slowly put her beads into the box, and advanced to say good-bye to the visitor.

"Good-bye, darling," said Mrs Millet, kissing her caressingly. "Why, you *are* a lucky little girl to be going to the sea-side."

Her manner was always affectionate, but her voice never sounded kind to Susan, and these words did not make half the impression of Maria's "Por little thing."

That remark still lingered in Susan's mind, and as she climbed slowly upstairs to the top of the house, she thought to herself that the only chance now of speaking to Mother was when she came up to see her after she was in bed. That was sometimes very late indeed, often when Susan was fast asleep, and knew nothing about it.

"But to-night," she said to herself, "I *will* keep awake. I'll pinch myself directly I feel the least bit sleepy;" for the mystery surrounding Aunt Enticknapp's house had deepened. Susan had now to wonder what sort of things Bahia girls were, and why she kept them at Ramsgate.

So, after Nurse and Maria had gone down-stairs she lay with her eyes wide open, watching the glimmering light which the lamps outside cast on the ceiling, and listening to the noise in the street below. Roll, roll, rumble, rumble, it went on without a break, for the house was in the midst of the great city of London. In the day-time she never noticed this noise much, but at night when everything else was silent, and everyone was going to sleep, it was strange to think that it still went on and on like that. Did it never stop? Sometimes she had tried to keep awake, so that she might find out, but she had never been able to do it. She had always fallen asleep with that roll, roll, roll, sounding in her ears. It must be getting very late now, surely Mother must come soon! I'll count a hundred, said Susan to herself, and then I shall hear her coming upstairs. But when she had done there was no sound at all in the house; not even a door shutting. It was all quite quiet.

"Can I have *been* asleep without knowing it?" she thought in alarm, and then—"can Mother have forgotten to come?" This last thought was so painful that she sat up in bed, stretched out her arms towards the door, and said out loud:

"Oh, *do* come, Mother." There was no answer, and no sound except the cinders falling in the grate, and the rumble of the wheels below. Susan gave a little sob; she felt deserted, disappointed, and ill-used. If *only* Mother would come!

All sorts of fancies, too, began to make the dark corners of the room dreadful, and chief amongst them loomed the form of Aunt Enticknapp just as Freddie had pictured her that day. In another minute Susan felt she should scream out with fear; but

she must not do it, because it would frighten Freddie, and make Mother so angry. What was that sudden gleam on the wall? The fire or the lamps? Neither, because it jiggled about too much; it was the light of a candle, coming nearer and nearer, and there was a step on the stairs at last. Almost directly someone gave the half-open door a little push and came quickly into the room; it was Mother in her pink dressing-gown which Susan always thought so beautiful, and her fair hair all plaited up in one long tail for the night. She came up to the bed, shading the flame of the candle with one hand:

"What, awake?" she said, "and crying! Oh, naughty Susan! What's the matter?"

Susan gulped down her tears. It was all right now that mother had not forgotten to come.

"I thought you weren't coming," she said.

"Well, but here I am, you see. And now you must be a good little girl, and go to sleep directly. Kiss me and lie down."

In another second Mother would be out of the room again Susan knew. She put up her hand and took hold of the lace frilling round the neck of the pink dressing-gown to keep her from going away.

"I've got something to ask you," she whispered eagerly.

"Well, what is it? Make haste, there's a good child, for I must go to Freddie; he's very restless to-night."

Susan's head felt in a whirl. What should she ask first? She must do it directly, or Mother would be gone. It all seemed confusion, and at last she could only stammer out:

"What's her other name? Is she cross?"

"Whose? Oh, you little goose, you mean Aunt Enticknapp, I suppose. Her name is Hannah. She's a very nice kind old lady, and she'll spoil you dreadfully, I don't doubt. Now Susan," in a graver tone, "remember you've promised not to give trouble, and if you're going to cry it will trouble me very much. You must think of poor Freddie and not be silly and selfish, but go away cheerfully on Monday. Will you?"

"Are you coming with me?" asked Susan, lifting her large eyes anxiously to her mother's face.

"All the way to Ramsgate! No, indeed, I shouldn't have time. You know we start ourselves the next day. Maria's going with you."

Susan's little chest heaved, and her fingers clung tightly to the lace frilling; Mother gently unclasped them one by one.

"Lie down and I will tuck you up nicely. There now, a kiss. Good-night, darling."

In another second the light of the candle, the pink dressing-gown, the fair hair, had all vanished together, and Susan was alone again. After all she had not been able to ask nearly all the questions she had prepared, and she could not help crying softly to herself for a little while before she went to sleep; for the noises in the street seemed to be saying now over and over again:

"All the way to Ramsgate, all the way to Ramsgate. Maria's going with you."

After this it was surprising how quickly the days went by and Monday came. Susan had her own little preparations to make for leaving home, and while Nurse was packing her clothes she brought her many odd-looking parcels, and asked anxiously:

"Can you get this in?"

Some of them *were* got in, but others had to be left behind—put away in the nursery cupboard for the whole winter. It seemed to Susan just the same thing as putting them away for ever. She chose, after careful thought, among her family of dolls the one to be taken with her; not the newest one, or the most smartly dressed, but one she had always been fond of, because she secretly considered her rather like Mother, especially when she plaited up her hair. It was a wax doll called Grace, with very blue eyes and yellow curls. After Grace's wardrobe had been looked through and packed up in a work-box, there was another very important thing to be finished, and that was a parting present for mother. As she was not to know of it, this had to be done in secret corners, and hastily hidden whenever she came near, so it had taken a good deal of time. It was a tiny pink silk pin-cushion in the shape of a heart, which Maria had cut out and fixed for her, and when it was done the letters "SI" were to be marked on it with pins, and it was to be put on mother's dressing-table on Sunday-night. There was more than one small speck of blood on it, where Susan had pricked her hot little fingers in a too earnest effort to take very small stitches, which

was a pity; perhaps, however, as it was *pink* silk they would not show much, and mother would not notice. Monday came; every one in the house was in a greater bustle than ever, and every minute there was a fresh question to be asked about something—about the journey to-day, or the journey to-morrow, and so many small details, that a wearied frown gathered on Mr Ingram's forehead and remained there; added to these troubles Freddie had one of his bad headaches, and would hardly let his mother leave him for a moment. Susan had scarcely spoken to her that morning, and now she stood in the nursery ready for her journey, clasping Grace in one arm, and a warm little cloak in the other. It was almost time to start, all her other farewells had been said, but she hesitated.

"Now, Miss Susan, my lamb," said Nurse kissing her again, "you've just time to run down and say good-bye to Missis and Master Freddie, and then you must be off."

She went down-stairs and softly into the room. It was darkened; Freddie was lying on his couch with a wet bandage on his forehead, and there was a strong smell of eau de Cologne. Mother stood near and changed the bandage now and then for a fresh one; she looked round, and held up her finger when she heard the door open.

"Ah, it's you dear," she said in a low voice; "be very quiet. Is it time for you to go? Is the cab there? Where's Maria?"

Susan walked up to the sofa; she had promised not to cry, and her throat felt so funny that she thought she had better not speak, so she did not answer any of these questions.

"Good-bye, darling," said Mrs Ingram, stooping to kiss her. "Give my love to Aunt Hannah, and remember that Maria has a note for her; and be good and obedient. You may write to me once every week, and I shall write to you when I can."

Susan clung silently to her mother's neck. If only she might have cried! Freddie pushed up the handkerchief, and looked at her with his dark heavy eyes.

"Good-bye, Susie," he murmured; "don't let old Emptycap bully you."

"And now," said her mother, "you must really go. Is Maria there? Kiss Freddie."

She led Susan to the door where Maria waited; in the hall the cabman was just shouldering the luggage.

"You know what I have told you, Maria. Take care of Miss Susan, and I shall expect you home early to-morrow."

Susan looked back when she reached the foot of the stair, and Mother smiled and nodded, waving her hand; then there was an impatient cry of "Mother!" from Freddie's room, and she vanished.

When Susan was in the cab with only Maria and Grace to see, she cried, and refused all comfort for some time; not only because she was going away to strangers, but also because up to the last minute she had so much hoped that Mother would say something about the pink pin-cushion. On rattled the cab past all the shops that Susan knew so well, and through the streets where she had often walked with Mother or Nurse. The journey to Ramsgate was to be made by sea, and they were to be driven to Saint Katharine's Docks to take the steamer which started from there at ten o'clock. Susan had heard her mother's directions to Maria, and knew exactly what they had to do; she felt indeed that she should remember them better, for she was accustomed to hear Nurse say that Maria had "no head." She had not therefore much respect for her, and thought it likely that she would make mistakes and forget things; but though this was the case, there was a great deal to be liked in Maria. For one thing she was always good-natured, and such a very good listener; really interested in all Susan's information and startled at any wonderful story, for she was a country girl, and had not yet ceased to be surprised at London life. Presently, therefore, as they got further on, Susan felt bound to point out and explain any objects or buildings of interest they passed. She dried her eyes, looked out of the window, and drew her companion's attention by sudden digs of her elbow, which at last became so frequent that Maria's head was constantly on the move from one side to the other for fear she should miss anything. Soon with a more violent nudge than usual Susan shouted in her ear:

"Look, Maria! there's the Tower of London!"

"Mercy on us!" exclaimed Maria, gazing open-mouthed; "what a big place!"

"It's where they used to cut off people's heads, you know," continued Susan excitedly; "and kept them in dungeons years

and years. And where they smothered the little princes with a pillow, and buried them under the stairs."

"Lawk!" said Maria.

"And the queen keeps her crown there now in a glass case."

"Well, I wouldn't do that," said Maria; "not if *I* was queen. Whatever's the good of having a crown?"

What with the rattling of the cab, the noise in the street, and Susan's own uncertainty on the subject, it was difficult to make Maria understand this; so any further explanation was put off, and they both looked silently out of the windows till they reached Saint Katharine's Docks.

Here there was a good deal of bustle and confusion, and also a little delay; for Maria, who had held the cabman's exact fare tightly grasped in one hand all the way, dropped it in getting out of the cab. A brisk young porter, however, came to their assistance: he picked up the money, shouldered the luggage, and showed Maria where to take the tickets; then he led them down some slippery steps and on board the steamboat, which lay alongside the wharf ready to start. It was all new and confusing to Susan, and it was not till she was settled on deck, wrapped in a warm shawl with Grace in her arms, that she looked round her at what was going on. There was so much to see that she could hardly open her eyes wide enough to take it all in. First there was the captain standing on his bridge with his rough blue pea-coat buttoned up to his chin, and a gold band round his cap; his face was quite round, and quite red, except in places where it was a sort of blue colour. His voice was very hoarse, and Susan could not make out a word he said, though he shouted out very loud now and then. Then there were the passengers, hurrying across the narrow gangway, with all sorts of bags, and parcels, and bundles of wraps, jostling each other in their eagerness to secure good places, and over their heads meanwhile dark smoke came rushing out of the tall black funnel, and there was a constant hissing noise. Then Susan noticed a silent man standing behind a great wheel at one end of the boat, and in front of this was written, "Please do not speak to the man at the wheel." She thought this very strange—it was almost as though the man at the wheel were in disgrace. As she was gazing at him and thinking how dull he must be, shut out from all conversation, she saw him turn the wheel backwards and forwards by some handles on which his hands were resting: at the same moment the captain gave a gruff roar, a great rope was hauled on board, and the steamer,

which till now had been curtseying gently up and down on the water, began to move smoothly on her way.

Maria, who up to this time had not ceased to inquire if this was the right boat for Ramsgate, settled herself at Susan's side when the start was really made. The sun shone so brightly that it was warm and pleasant on deck, and they found plenty to admire and point out to each other as they went along. A journey by the steamboat was much nicer, they agreed, than by the train. This agreeable state of things lasted while they were on the river, but presently the steamer began to roll a little, and to be tossed about by the waves of the open sea. Then Maria became more and more silent, until quite suddenly, to Susan's alarm, she rose, said hastily, "You stop here, Miss Susan," and dived down into the cabin near which they were sitting. What could be the matter? Susan looked helplessly round; she did not like to follow her, and yet it was not at all pleasant to be left here alone amongst all these strangers; she felt frightened and deserted. Next to her sat a tall thin man reading a book. He was tightly buttoned up to the chin in a threadbare great-coat greenish with age, and wore leather straps under his boots. She had noticed this when he came on board, and thought he looked different somehow from everyone else; now she lifted her eyes, and made a side-way examination of his face. He was clean shaven except for a short-pointed beard, and his greyish hair was very closely-cropped. His eyes she could not see, for they were bent on the pages before him, but presently raising them his glance fell on her, and he smiled reassuringly. Susan had never been used to smile at strangers; so, though she did not remove her gaze, it continued to be a very serious one, and also rather distressed.

"The Bonne has mal de mer?" he asked, after they had looked at each other for a minute in silence. Susan did not answer, and, indeed, did not know what he meant. This was a Frenchman, she thought to herself, and that was why he looked different to the other people.

"She is vot you call sea-sick," he repeated—"that is a bad thing—but she will be soon better." It was a comfort to hear this, though Susan could not imagine how he knew what was the matter with Maria.

"It arrives often," he remarked again, "to those who travel on the sea—myself, I have also suffered from it."

He looked so very kind as he said this, that Susan was encouraged to smile at him, and little by little to say a few

words. After that they quickly became friends, and he proved a very amusing companion; for, putting down his book, he devoted himself to her entirely, and told her many wonderful facts about the sea, and ships, and the sea-gulls flying overhead. She listened to these with great attention, bent on storing them up to tell Maria afterwards, and then became confidential in her turn. She told him about her home in London, and Freddie's illness, and the long journey he was going to begin to-morrow, and Monsieur appeared to take the very deepest interest in it all. By degrees Susan almost forgot poor Maria in the pleasure of this new and agreeable acquaintance.

It was now between one and two o'clock, and Monsieur produced from under the seat a long narrow black bag, and unlocked it. In it Susan could not help seeing there were a roll of manuscript, one or two books, a pair of slippers, and a flat white paper parcel. This last being opened, disclosed a hard round biscuit with seeds in it.

"Voyons!" he said gaily, "let us dine, ma petite demoiselle."

Now Susan was hungry, for it was past dinnertime, and she had breakfasted early. She knew that Maria had brought sandwiches and buns with her, but in her hasty retreat she had taken the bag, and had evidently forgotten all about it. She looked hesitatingly at the biscuit which her companion had broken in halves, and was now holding on the paper in front of her. It was the French gentleman's only biscuit—ought she to take it?

He guessed what was passing in her mind, and smiled kindly at her, nodding his head.

"If you will eat with me I shall have better appetite," he said. "It is perhaps a little dry—but after all, if one is hungry!—"

He shrugged his shoulders without finishing the sentence, and Susan took the half-biscuit, finding when she began it that she was even hungrier than she thought. She was still hungry when it was all gone, and she felt sure the French gentleman could easily have eaten more. She would have liked to offer him some of her sandwiches or a bun, but there was still no sign of Maria.

So hour after hour went by, until, late in the afternoon, her companion told her they were getting near Ramsgate.

"In one quarter of an hour we shall be at the pier. The journey will then be over. The passage has been fine and tranquil."

But poor Maria had not found it so, for it was not until the steamer was stopping that she appeared on deck looking very white, and staggering about helplessly. It was fortunate, therefore, that Susan's new friend was there, and that she herself could point out the luggage, for Maria had now quite lost her head, and was of no use at all.

The French gentleman, however, was most active and kind in their service, and did not leave them till they were safely in a cab with their property. Even then Maria had forgotten the address, and it was Susan who said:

"It is Belmont Cottage, Chatham Road."

"Ah!" exclaimed Susan's friend; "it is the house of Madame Enticknapp! We shall then perhaps meet again, *ma petite amie*."

He put his feet quite close together and executed a graceful bow as the cab drove away, with his hat pressed against his chest.

"What an old figure of fun!" was Maria's remark.

"I like him," said Susan. "He was very kind, and gave me half his dinner."

Maria said no more, for she was still in a very depressed state from the effects of the journey, and her head was "all of a swim," as she expressed it. So Susan was left to her own thoughts; and as the cab rattled along the road in front of the sea, she wondered anxiously which of those tall houses with balconies was Mrs Enticknapp's. But presently they turned up a side street, lost sight of the sea altogether, and drove through a town, where the shops were being lighted up, and came at last to a quiet road. The houses were not tall here like those facing the sea, and were not built in terraces, but stood each alone with its own name on its gate, and its own little garden in front, bordered with tamarisk bushes. Susan felt sure that one of those would be called Belmont Cottage, and she was right, for the cab stopped at last, and she really had arrived at Aunt Enticknapp's house! It was just like the others, except that it had an extra room built on at the side; the roof was low, and the windows had small diamond-shaped panes in them. Susan noticed, as they walked up the strip of garden to the door, that the borders were edged with cockle shells and whelk shells, which she thought very pretty but rather wasteful. She was, however, now beginning to feel extremely tired, and hungry

with the sea-air, and the two together produced a dizziness which made it difficult to think of anything else. She could not even feel frightened at the idea of seeing Mrs Enticknapp and the Bahia girls, and they hardly seemed like real people when she was actually in the room with them. She knew that there was a tall old lady with black curls and a cap, who spoke to her and kissed her, and two "grown-up" girls who came and knelt down in front of her and unpinned her shawl, chattering all the time. She also heard one of them say to the other: "Pretty?" and the answer, "No. She only looks so after Sophia Jane."

Later on, after some supper, she became sleepier still and more giddy and confused, so that she hardly knew that Maria was undressing her and putting her to bed. When there, however, she roused herself sufficiently to say:

"Maria, I can hear noises in the street here just like there are at home."

Maria's answer was the last sound she heard that night: "Bless yer 'art, Miss Susan, that ain't noises in the street. That's that botherin' sea goin' on like that. Worse luck!"

Chapter Two.

"Sophia Jane."

Poor Maria was to go back to London the next morning, and she came into Susan's room early to say good-bye, prepared for her journey in a very tearful state. It was not merely that she looked forward with anything but pleasure to another sea-voyage, but she had an affectionate nature, and, was fond of Susan, who on her side was sorry to think that she should not see Maria again. There were many parting messages to be conveyed to Mother, and Nurse, and Freddie. But at last it was really time to go, and Maria tore herself away with difficulty, hurriedly pressing into Susan's hand a new sixpence with a hole in it. She was gone now, and had taken the last bit of home with her—Susan was for the first time in her life alone with strangers. As she dressed herself she looked forward with alarm to meeting them all at breakfast, for she could not even remember what they were like last night; they seemed all mixed up together like things in a dream.

At last she gathered courage to leave the room, made her way very slowly down-stairs, and opening the first door she came to on the ground floor peeped timidly in. There was no one there, but the table was laid for breakfast, and she went in and stood before the fire. It was a long room, very low, with faded furniture, and a French window opening into a small garden, where there were gooseberry bushes. At the end opposite the fireplace there were two steps leading up to a door, and Susan wondered what was on the other side of it. On the mantelpiece, and in a corner cupboard and on a side-table, there were quantities of blue china mugs and plates and dishes, which she thought were queer things to have for ornaments; there were also some funny little figures carved in ivory and wood—dear little stumpy elephants amongst them, which she liked very much. The only picture in the room she presently noticed, hung over the fireplace in an oval frame. It was a portrait of a gentleman with powdered hair and a pig-tail; his eyes were as blue as the cups and dishes; he was clean shaven, and wore a blue coat and a very large white shirt frill. As Susan was looking up at him the door at the end of the room opened, and a maid-servant came stepping down with a dish in her hand. Susan could now see that the door led straight into a kitchen, which she thought odd but rather interesting. Almost immediately Aunt Hannah, the two girls she had seen the night before, and a little girl of about her own age came in, and they all sat down to breakfast. In spite of great shyness, Susan was able to take many furtive glances at her companions, and was relieved to find that at any rate Aunt Hannah was not a bit like what Freddie had said. She was a tall, straight old lady with a high cap, black curls, and a velvet band across her forehead. She did not look either witch-like or cross, and Susan felt that she should not be afraid of her when she knew her better. She soon found that the names of the two "grown-up" girls, as she called them in her mind, were Nanna and Margaretta; Nanna was fair and freckled, and Margaretta very swarthy, with a quantity of black curls. They chattered and laughed incessantly, and tried to pet Susan and make her talk, but did not succeed very well. She thought she did not like either of them much, and wished they would leave her alone, for she was interested in watching the movements of the little girl and wondering who she was. She was a very thin little thing with high shoulders and skinny arms, dressed in a dingy-green plaid frock. Everything about her looked sharp—her chin was sharp, her elbows were sharp; the glances she cast at Susan over her bread and milk were sharp, and when she spoke her voice sounded sharp also. Her features were not ugly, but her expression was unchildlike and old. No one seemed to notice her much, but if Nanna or

Margaretta said anything to her, it was not in the coaxing tones they used to Susan, but had a reproving sound.

After breakfast came prayers, in which Buskin the maid-servant joined, sitting a little apart at the end of the room with a severe look on her face. Then Aunt Hannah sat down in the arm-chair near the fire. "And now, my little Susan," she said, "come here and talk to me."

Susan stood submissively at her side, and answered all the questions put to her about Mother and Freddie and herself; but she did not do much of the talking, for she was shy, and everything seemed forlorn and strange to her. What a comfort Maria's well-known face would have been! As it was, the only familiar object was her doll Grace, which she had brought downstairs, and now held tightly clutched under one arm.

"And here," said Mrs Enticknapp, when she had finished her inquiries; "here, you see is a nice little companion for you of your own age. She will learn lessons with you, and play with you, and I hope you will soon be good friends. Sophia Jane, come here."

Sophia Jane came and stood on the other side of Aunt Hannah, rolled her arms tightly up in her pinafore, and stared without winking at Susan and her doll.

"To-day," continued Mrs Enticknapp, "you shall not do any lessons, and while I am busy with Nanna and Margaretta you may amuse yourselves quietly. After dinner you shall all go out for a walk. If you crumple up your pinafore in that way, Sophia Jane," she added, "you will have another bad mark."

Sophia Jane unrolled her arms, and smoothed the pinafore down in front with her small bony hands; then she thrust out her pointed chin, and asked eagerly:

"May we go and play in the attic?"

Aunt Hannah hesitated. "If it's not too cold for Susan, you may. If it is, you must come and play at some quiet game in here. But understand that you must make no noise while I am busy."

"Come along," said Sophia Jane. She caught hold of Susan's hand and led her quickly out of the room and upstairs, casting rapid glances at her over her shoulder as they went. "Fond of dolls?" she inquired as they were climbing the second flight of stairs.

"I'm fond of *this* one," answered Susan, clasping Grace a little closer.

"I had one once," said Sophia Jane with a superior air; "but I haven't got her now."

"Where is she?" asked Susan.

"I killed her," said Sophia Jane in a cold voice.

"Oh!" said Susan stopping still a moment; "what did you do that for?"

"I hated her," replied Sophia Jane shortly; "she had such starin' eyes."

Susan gazed at the small murderess with awe. "How did you do it?" she asked at length in a lowered tone.

"Drove a nail right through her skull," answered Sophia Jane, with a spiteful gleam in her blue eyes. "Here's the attic!"

They had reached the top storey after a last short flight of stairs without any carpet. Here there were only two rooms, one for Buskin, the maid-servant, and the other unfurnished. Sophia Jane flung open the door of this last with an air of triumph. "We can do just as we like here," she said; "and down-stairs we couldn't talk above a whisper while they're doing lessons."

Susan entered wondering. Everything seemed very odd at Aunt Hannah's; but somehow its strangeness made it rather interesting, it was such a contrast to home. There she had always played in well-furnished rooms with plenty of toys, and good fires in winter. The attic had no carpet and no fire, and the only things in it were one broken old chair, a poker, some rolls of dusty wall-paper, and some large black boxes. Its single attraction was its lone-ness; there was no one here who could say "don't," and no need for lowered voices and quietness. This Susan soon found to be a very delightful thing, for her life at home had been carried on as it were on tip-toe, for fear of disturbing Freddie, and she had always been taught that little girls should be never heard, and very seldom seen.

"If you like dolls," continued Sophia Jane in an off-hand manner, "perhaps Nanna would lend you Black Dinah. She's more good-natured than Margaretta."

"I don't want to ask her, thank you," said Susan. "Why does she have a doll? she's too old to play with it, isn't she?"

"Oh, gracious me, yes, of course," said Sophia Jane with a shrug. "They're both quite grown-up. Nanna's seventeen, and Margaretta's eighteen. They only keep it as a curiosity; all made of rags and covered with black silk, and dressed like a native. The nuns made it in the convent at Bahia."

"What is Bahia?" asked Susan.

"It's a place in America where they come from. They came over in a ship."

"What for?"

"Why, to learn English, of course, you silly thing!—and French too—and all sorts of things. There's a French master comes once a week to teach them. And they learn lessons with Aunt too. They're doing them now."

So this was the meaning of Bahia girls! Susan thought it over a little and then asked:

"Did you come over in the ship too?"

Sophia Jane paused in the midst of a fantastic dance she was performing, with the poker brandished in one hand.

"Of course not," she said scornfully. "I'm English."

"Who are you, then?" asked Susan. She felt that the question sounded rude, but it was a thing that she must know.

"I'm an orphan," said Sophia Jane cheerfully, and she took an agile leap on to one of the old bores.

Susan gazed at her. She was not at all her idea of an orphan. In pictures they always wore black and looked sad, and at home there was a crossing-sweeper who said he was an orphan, and seemed to think it a hard thing, and that he was much to be pitied. Then another thought struck her: "If Aunt Hannah's your aunt as well as mine, I suppose we're cousins—ain't we?" she asked.

"She isn't," said Sophia Jane, swinging her arms round and preparing to jump off the box. "We all call her Aunt. She likes it better. See if you can jump as far as I can."

In these and other amusements the morning passed quickly away in a very different manner to anything Susan had known before. It was certainly better than playing alone, though the attic was bare and Sophia Jane's speech and behaviour were sometimes strange and startling. Susan almost forgot her home-sickness for a while, and found a companion of her own age far more interesting than imaginary conversations with dolls. After they were both tired of jumping, in which exercise Sophia Jane's spare form was by far the most successful, the headless body of the murdered doll was dragged out from behind a box and examined.

"She *used* to be a pretty doll," said its owner, looking enviously at Grace.

"It's a pity you killed her," said Susan, "because we could play at so many more things if we had a doll each."

"Well, she's dead," said Sophia Jane recklessly. "Where's her head?" asked Susan; "perhaps we might mend it."

"Broken all up into tiny little bits," said the other.

Susan looked silently at the limp pink leather body stretched out on the floor, then she exclaimed suddenly:

"I tell you what!"

"What?" said Sophia Jane.

"We'll get a new head for her at the shop. I know you can do it, because Maria once bought one for one of mine."

"That's all very well," said Sophia Jane sharply; "but I haven't got enough money. I've only got twopence-halfpenny left."

"Oh, that wouldn't do, of course," said Susan. "You couldn't get one large enough for the body under eighteenpence. When will you have some more?"

"Not till Saturday week, because I've lost all the next in bad marks."

"What do you have bad marks for?" asked Susan.

"Lots of things: rumpling my pinafores, leaving the door open, standing on one side of my foot, making faces, not knowing my lessons—a farthing every time."

Susan's eyes opened wide.

"Why don't you leave off doing them?" she asked.

"Oh, I don't care to," said Sophia Jane; pressing her lips tightly together. "I like to vex 'em sometimes. I'd rather do it than have the money."

Susan's round face grew more and more serious. She did not know what to make of Sophia Jane, who seemed a very naughty little girl and certainly did not deserve to be helped. She had thought of offering to give her something towards the doll's head, but now she did not quite know what to do.

"Well," she said patronisingly, "if you want to buy the new head you'll have to be good, you know; and then you'll save your money."

"Fiddle-di-dee!" was Sophia Jane's rude reply, tauntingly. This might have led to a quarrel, for Susan, much shocked, was just preparing a reproachful speech, but fortunately the voice of Nanna was heard calling them down to dinner. During this both the little girls were silent and subdued, and were seldom spoken to, except that Sophia Jane was repeatedly corrected. It was wonderful how often she was told not to fidget, not to eat so fast, not to shrug her shoulders, not to make faces. As surely as anyone looked in her direction there was something wrong. It did not seem to make much impression on her, although her thin little face looked very sullen; and once when Nanna called Susan "darling" a dark frown gathered on her brow.

"Unless you can look more pleasant and aimiable, Sophia Jane," said Aunt Hannah, observing this, "you will be left at home this afternoon."

All this strengthened Susan's opinion that Sophia Jane was a very naughty little girl. If it were not so they would not surely speak to her so sharply and reprove her so often. She hoped, nevertheless, that this last threat would not be carried out, for however naughty she might be she was a companion with whom conversation was possible, and a walk alone with Nanna and Margaretta would be dull. She was relieved, therefore, at three o'clock to find that Sophia Jane was ready to go too, dressed in a very unbecoming poke bonnet and black cape. They might be out one hour and a half, Aunt Hannah said, but there was a little delay at starting because each of the elder girls wished to go in a different direction. Nanna preferred the town, and Margaretta to walk on the parade, and it was some

minutes before it was settled that they should go one way and return the other, dividing the time equally.

"Which way do you like best?" inquired Susan as she and Sophia Jane followed closely behind their companions.

"Neither of 'em," answered she. "I like to go on the beach and pick up things, but they won't ever do that except in summer when they bathe."

Neither of the little girls cared much about the walk in the town; for though some of the shops looked interesting, these were not the ones near which Nanna and Margaretta lingered. They only stopped and looked in at the windows of bonnet shops or jewellers' shops, and these were not attractive to Sophia Jane or Susan. But after a while they turned down a street where there were no shops at all, and at the end of it they came on to the parade and saw the sea. It was a wonderful sight to Susan, for she had been too tired to notice it much the day she had arrived, and now it burst upon her suddenly like something new. It was so beautiful and there was so much of it that it made her quite gasp for breath; the sun shining on it made a great glittering high-road stretching away in the distance till it joined the sky and was lost there; the waves came rolling, rolling, one after the other, up to the shore, curled over, and dashed themselves down so hard that they were broken up into hissing silver foam and tossed their spray high in the air. Everything seemed to be silver and gold and diamonds at the sea-side, it all sparkled, and twinkled, and shone so much. Susan's eyes were dazzled and she put up her hand to shield them, for she was used to the shadow and gloom of the London streets.

"Oh," she cried, "how I should like to go down on the sands!"

"Perhaps they'll let us go some day," said Sophia Jane. "It's best to go on the rocks when the sea's out."

"Out!" said Susan in astonishment. "Does it ever go quite away?"

Sophia Jane was so amused at this innocent question that she was unable to answer for some moments. She giggled so much and so loud that Margaretta turned round and said angrily:

"Vulgar child! Be quiet and walk properly."

Susan did not like to be laughed at. She walked along in silence, with hot cheeks, and determined that she would ask no more questions.

Sophia Jane continued to chuckle softly to herself for a little while and then said:

"There's a low tide and a high tide, of course. When it's low it's ever so far out, and when it's high it's ever so far in."

"Oh yes, I know, I remember now; I've learned that," said Susan hastily, for she did not wish Sophia Jane to think her quite ignorant. "It has something to do with the moon."

"The moon!" exclaimed Sophia Jane with utter disdain in her voice, "you're muddling things up."

"It has," repeated Susan positively, "it's in the geography book."

"I don't believe it," said Sophia Jane.

"I wonder," said Susan half to herself, with her eyes fixed on the sea, "what prevents it from running right over all the land."

Sophia Jane shrugged her shoulders.

"That is a thing *no one* understands," she said, "so it's no use to bother about it." Then with a sudden sharp glance to the left, "There goes Monsieur La Roche."

Susan looked round and saw a tall thin figure just hurrying round a corner, but she had time to recognise it before it disappeared; it was the kind French gentleman.

"He's the French master," continued Sophia Jane; "such a silly old thing. We all laugh at him."

"Why?" asked Susan.

"Oh, we can't help it. He makes such funny bows and he smiles so, and says his words wrong. You'll laugh at him too."

Susan was silent. Somehow after this description she did not feel inclined to tell Sophia Jane of her meeting with Monsieur La Roche on the steamboat, and his kindness to her.

"I should think he did not like to be laughed at," she said at last.

"Oh, what does it matter," said Sophia Jane with much contempt, "he's only a poor eggsile."

"What does 'eggsile' mean?" asked Susan.

Sophia Jane hesitated; she did not know, but she would not confess ignorance.

"It means any person who isn't English," she said.

For the rest of the walk Susan thought a good deal about the French master. He had been kind to her when she needed a friend, and she had felt grateful to him, and hoped she should see him again; she had considered him a very pleasant gentleman. But now that Sophia Jane had spoken so slightly of him, and called him a "silly old thing," and turned him into a sort of joke, she began to feel differently. She was now rather sorry that she knew him, for she was afraid Sophia Jane would laugh at her too, and she disliked that more than anything in the world. It seemed easier now to join her in finding something ridiculous in the "eggsile" as she called him, than to remember his kindness and good-nature to herself and Maria. She hoped, therefore, that when he came to Belmont Cottage to give his lesson that he would have forgotten her, and would say nothing of the meeting on the steamboat. This first day at Ramsgate had been full of so many strange sights and new people that Susan had had no time to be home-sick, but when evening came she suddenly felt a great longing to see some one she knew—Mother or Nurse or Freddie, or even Maria. It seemed an immense while since she had parted from them all; and when she remembered that it was really only one day and one night, and how many days and nights must pass before she saw them again, she could hardly bear it without crying. They were all very kind to her here, but they were all strange. She did not care for Nanna's and Margaretta's frequent kisses and endearing names, it was impossible to be fond of them in a minute; as for Sophia Jane, though she was amusing to play with, there was no comfort at all in her. It was Aunt Hannah at length who saw her sitting dolefully in a corner, and tried to give her consolation. She called her to come and sit near her, and talked so kindly that Susan forgot her troubles and became interested. Aunt Hannah told her about Algiers, the place where Freddie was going, and how he would get there in a ship, and what he would see and do; and then, pointing to the funny little

figures and china things, she said that they had been brought over the sea from countries a long way off.

When Susan ventured to ask who brought them, her aunt showed her the portrait of the gentleman with the pig-tail hanging over the mantle-piece.

"It was your great-grandfather who brought them," she said, "Captain John Enticknapp. He made many long voyages to China and Japan, and the West Indies. Once he found out some islands where no one had ever been before, and they are called after his name."

Susan thought this very wonderful and she gazed up at her aunt with such interest in her eyes that the old lady was pleased, and stroked her hair kindly.

"Some day, if you are a good child," she said, "and try to make yourself happy here, I will tell you a story about Captain Enticknapp. A very interesting one, and quite true."

"May Sophia Jane hear it too?" asked Susan.

Aunt Hannah's manner changed.

"When Sophia Jane tries to please me, and correct her faults," she said, "I shall be willing to give her pleasure, but not till then."

Susan felt more and more certain that Sophia Jane was a very naughty little girl.

Chapter Three.

Monsieur La Roche.

And this feeling grew stronger as the days went on, for Susan found that Sophia Jane was always in disgrace about something; she was so constantly having bad marks and losing farthings, that there seemed no chance at all that she would ever save enough money to buy a new head for the doll. This was partly her own fault, and partly because the whole household seemed to take for granted that she would behave badly and never do right; indeed there were days when, after she had been scolded and punished very often, a spirit of

obstinacy entered her small frame, and her whole being was bent upon ill-behaviour and mischief.

Susan looked on in dismay, and counted up the farthings as one after the other they were recklessly forfeited by some fresh piece of naughtiness.

"You've lost two week's money," she whispered in Sophia Jane's ear, hoping to check her; but its only result was to urge her to wilder acts, and the next minute she was detected in making a grimace at Margaretta, whom she specially disliked. Sophia Jane was certainly not a pleasant child, and it was not surprising that no one loved her.

"Look at Susan," they said to her constantly, "how well Susan behaves! how upright Susan sits! how perfectly Susan says her lessons! how good Susan is!"—but Sophia Jane took no heed, it did not improve her a bit, but if possible made her worse to have this shining example held up for her to copy. As to Susan, she now heard her own praises so often that she began to think not only that Sophia Jane was very bad, but that she herself must be uncommonly good. At home it had always been taken as a matter of course that she would be quiet, obedient, and useful, and learn her lessons properly; it had never been considered anything remarkable. Here, however, she was continually called "clever," and "good," and "dear little thing," when she did the most common things, so that she soon began to hold her head higher and to look down upon Sophia Jane with a very condescending air.

Meanwhile there was one thing she dreaded, and that was Monsieur La Roche's French lesson in which she was to join; she had now been a week at Ramsgate, and the day was approaching. Whenever he was mentioned Margaretta had always some giggling joke to make, and Sophia Jane echoed them. They imitated the way in which he spoke English, and the way in which he bowed when he came into the room, and the way in which he smiled and rubbed his hands; everything he did appeared to be laughable, and though Susan had not found it so on the steamboat, she now began to think that they must be right. Even Maria, she remembered, had called him "a figure of fun." How she hoped that he would not say anything about that journey! Her cheeks grew quite hot when she thought of how she had told him her name, and where she lived, and all sorts of confidential things. They would all laugh at her—it would be dreadful. Now, to laugh at Monsieur might be pleasant, but to be laughed at herself was, Susan felt, a very different matter.

So when the day came, and they were all sitting round the table with their books ready for the class, she bent her head down as the French master entered the room, in the faint hope that he would not notice her. But that was of no use. Monsieur had hardly made his bow and taken his seat before Aunt Hannah looked round from her arm-chair at the fireside.

"You have a new pupil to-day, Monsieur. My little niece, Miss Susan Ingram."

His attention thus directed, Monsieur leaned forward, and a kindly smile of recognition brightened his face as he saw Susan.

"Ah! c'est vrai," he said; "it is my leetle friend, Mees Susanne. We know ourselves already; is it not so?"

The dreaded moment had come, and it was even more uncomfortable than she had expected. Everyone was looking at her, and waiting for her to answer, and she saw a mischievous glitter in Sophia Jane's eyes which were fixed on her like two blue beads.

Aunt Hannah said, "Indeed, how is that?" and Monsieur still leant towards her, stroking his short beard and wrinkling up his face with a pleased smile. But Susan said nothing. She hung down her head, her cheeks crimsoned, and she looked as guilty and ashamed as though she had done something wrong; a very different little girl to the one who had chatted with Monsieur on board the steamboat and shared his biscuit. She was shy, he thought, as the English miss very often was; and, though he did not understand the complaint, he was far too good-natured to lengthen her discomfort. "Nevare mind," he said kindly, "we shall talk together later." Turning to Aunt Hannah he explained as well as he could in English how he and Susan had met on the journey, his pupils listening open-mouthed meanwhile and giggling at his broken attempts to make his meaning clear. Then to Susan's relief the lesson began, and she was no longer the object of everyone's attention; but she was surprised to find how very little trouble they took to learn anything. Instead of this they seemed to try which could remember least and pronounce the words worst. When Nanna and Margaretta read aloud they made the same mistakes a dozen times in one page, pitched their voices in a high sing-song drawl, and stopped now and then to laugh in a smothered manner at some hidden joke. A little worried frown gathered on their patient master's brow as this went on, but he never lost his temper or failed to make his corrections with courtesy. Susan at first, from force of habit, bent her attention on the page of French dialogue which she

and Sophia Jane had to learn; but too soon the bad example round her had its effect. She began to return Sophia Jane's nudges, to listen to her whispers, to look out of the window opposite, and to make no sort of effort to learn her lesson. True, when the time came to say it, she was a little ashamed of not knowing a word correctly, and was sorry when Monsieur returned the book with a sad shake of the head. But this feeling did not last; none of the others cared to please him, so why should she? He was only Monsieur La Roche, the French master, the "poor eggsile," as Sophia Jane had called him. It did not matter. Encouraged by her companions Susan soon became as rude, as careless, and as troublesome as they were. If Monsieur had had any hope that she would prove a better pupil than the rest he was sadly mistaken. "Soyez sage, Mademoiselle," he said to her pleadingly, but it was of no use. Susan had forgotten for the time how to behave wisely. And it was the same on every occasion: the French lesson was always a scene of impertinence and ill-behaviour. There were moments when Susan, seeing Monsieur look unusually tired and worn, had twinges of conscience and almost resolved to be good. But she had been naughty so long now that it was too late to turn back; they would laugh at her, and it would be quite impossible to be good all alone. Sophia Jane had only to rub her hands like Monsieur, and say in broken English: "Ah! it is my leetle friend, Miss Susanne," to make Susan ashamed and give up all idea of changing her conduct.

Now a complaint to Aunt Hannah would have altered all this at once; but, unfortunately, Monsieur was far too good-natured to make one. Indeed, as she always sat in the room during the French class, he may have thought that she saw nothing wrong, and that these manners were usual in England. The fact was, however, that Aunt Hannah knew very little French, and concluded that as the girls were never troublesome at their lessons with her it was the same thing with Monsieur. If she chanced to hear the sound of a titter, it was at once checked when she glanced round at the offender, and she would have been surprised, indeed, if she had known of the sufferings the French master endured.

When she inquired about the progress made, his reply was always the same: "Assez bien," which she considered quite satisfactory.

Time went on. Monsieur had given four lessons, Susan had written four letters to Mother and had been four times to chapel with Aunt Hannah. She had, therefore, now been four whole

weeks at Ramsgate, and the days seemed to go by quickly, instead of creeping along as they did at first. And this was in a great measure owing to the companionship of Sophia Jane, for, though Aunt Hannah was kind and Nanna and Margaretta caressing, Susan's life would have been dull without someone to invent games with her and play in the attic; and, although she thought herself far superior to Sophia Jane, she knew this very well. When she wrote to her mother she was able to say that she liked being at the sea-side very much, but she always added: "We have not been on the sands yet." Now this was a thing she longed to do, for Sophia Jane had told her of so many delightful things to do and find there, that it seemed the most desirable place on earth; besides, she wanted very much to begin a collection of shells and sea-weed for Freddie. There was a card hanging in her bed-room, on which pink and green sea-weeds were arranged in a sort of bouquet, with some verses written underneath, each ending with the line: "Call us not weeds, we are flowers of the sea." Susan thought that very beautiful, and determined to try and make one just like it for Mother. But the right day never seemed to come for the sands; it was always too cold, or too windy, or Nanna and Margaretta wanted to go somewhere else. Almost in despair, Susan made her usual request to Aunt Hannah one morning: "May we go on the sands?" It was a Saturday, a whole holiday, and the day was sunny and mild.

"On the sands, my dear?" said her Aunt. "I am too busy to go, but I daresay the girls will take you."

But as usual, Nanna and Margaretta had widely different plans for spending their Saturday, and neither of them wished to go on the sands. Nanna had a hat to trim, and Margaretta was to visit some friends. Aunt Hannah saw Susan's disappointment.

"Well," she said, "we will manage it in this way. I will spare Buskin to go with you and Sophia Jane as far as the little cove near the pier; there she shall leave you to play for an hour and then fetch you again. You must both promise me, however, not to stray further away, not to get wet, not to lose sight of the pier, and to come back with Buskin directly you see her. Can I trust you?"

They both promised eagerly, much excited at the thought of such an expedition, and above all at the idea of being left alone for a whole hour. During the morning they watched the weather anxiously and made many plans.

"I shall take Grace," said Susan, "and my little basket. What shall *you* take?"

Poor Sophia Jane had not many possessions to choose from.

"I shall take my skipping-rope," she said.

Thus provided, they set forth at three o'clock with the grave Buskin in attendance. Susan jumped, and laughed, and chattered with pleasure, she was so glad to think that she was going on the sands at last, and Sophia Jane, though she never showed high spirits in the same manner, was in a cheerful and agreeable mood.

Soon they came to the little cove. The sea was as she had expressed it, very far out indeed, and had left the great black rocks wet and shining, all ready to be played on. Between them there were deep quiet pools, so clear that you could see down to the very bottom, and watch all sorts of cunning live things, which darted, or or lay motionless in them; shrimps, tiny pale crabs, pink star-fishes, and strange horny shells clinging so tightly to the rock that no small fingers could stir them. Some of the rocks were bare, and others covered with masses of dark sea-weed which made a popping noise when it was trodden on, like the sound of little pistols. Here and there were spaces of sand, so white and firm that it made you long to draw pictures on it, or at least to write your name there. Could there, altogether, be a better playground than this on a sunny day? Sophia Jane had been quite right; it was a lovely place!

It offered so many attractions, and was so new to Susan, that she did not know where to begin first, but stood still uttering exclamations of delight and wonder. Sophia Jane, however, had made the best of her time already. As soon as Buskin disappeared, she at once removed her shoes and stockings, and now stood bare-legged in the middle of a deepish pool poking out crabs from under a ledge of rock.

"You'd better begin to collect things," she called out to Susan, "or you'll waste all your time."

Susan felt that this was true, but the difficulty now was what to put into the basket, and what to leave out; there were so many lovely things she wanted to keep, and yet it would not hold them all. She wandered from rock to rock finding something fresh and curious every minute, and calling out to Sophia Jane to ask what it was. Sometimes she knew, sometimes she did not, but she always gave some sort of name to it which satisfied

her companion. So the time went by, and Susan's little basket had been full and empty over and over again, but she had at last firmly determined to keep the treasures that were now in it, and not to be tempted to change them for anything new; she sat down on a comfortable flat rock, and spread them all out beside her to examine them. At a short distance was the witch-like form of Sophia Jane, bent nearly double in her efforts to peer into the dwelling-place of some sea-creature amongst the rocky crevices; she was very successful in these sharp-eyed inquiries, a match even for the little scurrying crabs, whose only chance of escape was to bury themselves hurriedly deep in the wet sand. All at once she gave a short shriek of surprise and rapture which was evidently wrung from her by some startling discovery. Susan hastened to join her, tumbling over the slippery rocks, and leaving all her possessions behind. It was indeed a very strange and a very beautiful thing that Sophia had found sticking on to the ledge of a rock. Something like a jelly, something like a flower, with crimson petals which stirred faintly about as if moved by the wind.

"Oh, *what* is it?" said Susan in great excitement, "is it a seaweed?"

"Of *course* not," answered Sophia Jane. "I've found 'em before, often. It's a 'Seen Enemy.'"

"I've heard of a *flower* with a name something like that," said Susan.

"That's a 'Wooden Enemy,'" replied Sophia Jane with scorn; "this isn't a plant, it's an animal."

"Is it alive, then?" asked Susan.

"I should just think it is! It can eat like anything."

"What does it eat?"

"Little tiny crabs and shrimps. Now, I'm going to drop a pebble into it, and you'll see it will think it's something to eat, and shut its mouth. Look!"

Susan thought it rather cruel to deceive the Enemy in this manner, but she could not help watching curiously to see what it would do, as Sophia Jane popped a little stone into the midst of its soft waving petals. It happened just as she had said. The Enemy tucked them all in, and suddenly became nothing but a mould of smooth red jelly.

The two little girls bent over this new discovery for some time with the keenest interest, but by and by there arose a dispute, for one wished to tear it from its resting-place and carry it home, and the other to leave it where it was. Sophia Jane declared that it was her Enemy because she had found it, and she should do as she liked, and Susan begged her with tears not to disturb it. When these were of no use she became angry, and called Sophia cruel and naughty; but for that Sophia Jane did not care one whit. She only repeated doggedly, "I shall take it home, and keep it in a basin of salt water."

"Then it will die," said Susan hotly, "and you're very cruel and wicked."

Sophia Jane did not answer. She was gazing fixedly over Susan's shoulder at the spot where the basket and collection had been left.

"Ha! ha!" she suddenly exclaimed triumphantly, pointing to it.

Susan looked quickly round. Alas! while her back was turned the deceitful sea had crawled quietly up and taken possession of her treasures. The flat rock was covered by the waves, and the basket was bobbing lightly up and down on the water.

With a cry of vexation she scrambled over the rocks towards it; at least she would try and save the basket, though the other things were lost; it was one Mother had given her, and she was very fond of it. But no, she could not reach it. Sometimes the waves brought it back almost to her feet, but before she could seize it, it sailed merrily away further than ever. After many vain efforts she stood looking hopelessly at it much cast down and disappointed. Not only had she lost her collection, the labours of nearly an hour, but now even if she made another she had nothing to carry it home in. Sophia Jane, who had watched her failures with chuckles of delight, now came and stood by her with her skipping-rope in her hand.

"I can get it," she said.

Susan looked round in surprise; this was kind of Sophia Jane after she had said so many cross things to her.

"If I get it," she went on, tying a sort of noose at the end of the rope, "will you give it me for my own?"

Susan hesitated. She did not want to lose the basket, and yet it would be almost the same thing to give it to Sophia Jane.

Meanwhile it came again nearly within reach of her outstretched fingers, just escaped them, and was borne away by the waves. Sophia Jane stood waiting her answer.

"You may have it," said Susan, for she could not bear to see the basket lost for ever.

Then Sophia Jane watched her opportunity, cast the rope over it just at the right instant, caught it in the noose, and drew it safely on to the rock.

"Now it's mine!" she cried exultingly, holding up her dripping prize, "and I shall take the enemy home in it."

What an unpleasant little girl Sophia Jane was! Susan felt at that moment that she almost hated her; she was selfish, and mean, and cruel and unkind, and deserved all the scoldings she had from everyone. She could not bear to be near her just now; she would go as far from her as she possibly could. Leaving her, therefore, crouched on the rock near her prey, Susan turned her back upon her and started off by herself in another direction, and in doing this she also turned her back upon the pier. She was so injured in her mind, however, and so occupied with hard thoughts about Sophia Jane, that she could not notice this or anything else for some time. On she went, jumping from rock to rock with Grace tucked under one arm, pausing now and then to look at some strange and beautiful thing which lay in her path; how she wished for her basket, that she might pick some of them up! But at least she could take a few in her pocket, though it was inconveniently small. Soon it was heavy with damp stones, sea-weed, and shells, then she lifted the skirt of her frock in front and filled that, and all this while she was going further from Sophia Jane, further from the pier, further from the little cove, where they had promised to wait for Buskin. She never once looked back, however, for there were always lovely things still further in the distance that she must get. When she was close to these lovely things they sometimes turned out to be quite common and not worth picking up; but there was sure to be something more tempting just a little way beyond. So she went on and on, and would have gone much further but her progress was suddenly checked in a very disagreeable manner; for, springing too heedlessly on to a slippery rock, and overbalanced by her burden, she fell straightway into a large shallow pool of water. It was such a sudden shock that all her treasures were scattered far and wide, and poor Grace was thrown out of her arms to some distance where she lay flat on her face. Confused and startled, Susan's first thought was that she should be drowned, and she cried out

for help; but, having winked the water out of her eyes, she at once saw that it was quite a shallow pool, scrambled quickly out and stood on the rock. Then she looked down at herself with dismay; for, though there was not enough water to drown her, it had wetted her from top to toe, and she was a forlorn object indeed—her clothes hung to her dripping, her straw-hat floated in the pool, and she had cut her chin in falling against a sharp stone. The only thing to be done now was to get back to Sophia Jane as fast as possible, and she also remembered for the first time that Buskin must be waiting; so, shivering a good deal and feeling very wretched, she fished out her hat, picked up Grace who was the only dry piece of property she now possessed, and prepared to return. But lo! when she looked round, the whole place seemed to have changed! There was no Sophia Jane to be seen, no pier, nothing but high white cliffs, and rocks, and sea. Sophia Jane must be hiding, and Susan felt too miserable now to stand on her dignity, so she called her as loud as she could, several times.

No answer. No one to be seen. And where was the pier? How could that have gone away? Confused, and still giddy with her tumble, Susan hardly knew what she was doing, but her one idea was that she must find the pier, and if it was not in this direction it must be in the other. So she turned again, and went on *the wrong way*. Now, it was only hidden from her by the projecting cliffs which formed the little bay into which she had wandered, and at that very minute Buskin and Sophia Jane were not really far away. But they could not see or hear her, and now she was going further from them as quickly as she could.

Not very quickly, because it was so difficult to get on, with her wet clothes clinging so heavily; even her boots were full of water and made queer gurgling noises at every step, and her hair hung limp and draggled over her shoulders. Susan had never been so uncomfortable. The cut on her chin hurt a good deal too, for the salt water got into it and made it smart; when she drew her handkerchief out of her pocket, it was only a little damp rag, and no use at all; everything was salt watery except Grace, who was dry and clean, and had only suffered a dinge on her nose by her fall. Susan envied her neat appearance; she was a dignified little girl, and could not bear to look odd or ridiculous, so at first she hoped she should meet no one before she got to Buskin and Sophia Jane. The latter would certainly laugh at her; but, after all, the accident had been her fault, for if she had not been so ill-behaved about the Enemy and the basket, it would not have happened.

Stumbling on, with these things in her mind, she expected every moment to see the pier, but there were still only rocks and cliffs and sea. The waves came rolling in, each one a tiny bit further than the last, and one splashed suddenly so near her, that it covered her with spray. She started back to avoid it; but "after all," she thought the next minute, "it couldn't make me wetter than I am." On, on, on, and now every step began to be more and more painful, for the sand was so wet that she had to walk on the rough stony beach close to the foot of the cliffs. Poor Susan! she felt very tired and desolate; her feet ached, and her arms ached, and her head ached, she would have been thankful to meet people now, even though they might laugh at her. Worst of all, the thought suddenly darted into her mind that she had lost the way; she stood still and looked vainly round for some familiar object, something to guide her—there was nothing. As far as she could see, it was all the same—tall white cliffs, yellow sand, and tossing waves. The only living creature besides herself was a beautiful grey and white bird with long wings which flew skimming about over the water, and sometimes dipped down into it. As Susan watched it, she remembered where she had seen birds of that kind before, and who had told her that they were called sea-gulls; the steamboat, and Monsieur La Roche's kind voice came back to her. How good he had been, and how badly she had repaid him since; she had indeed been ungrateful and naughty to laugh at him. How thankful she would be to see him now, and to hear him say, "My leetle friend, Mees Susanne!" But there was no chance of that; Monsieur had helped her once in trouble, but he could not come down from the skies to her assistance, and there was no one in sight on land or sea. Suddenly she felt too tired and aching and miserable to struggle on any further, and sinking down on the hard beach like a little damp heap of clothes, she hugged Grace up to her breast and hid her face against her. She sat in this way for some minutes, hearing nothing but the breaking of the waves on the shore and the rattle of the pebbles, when suddenly another noise caught her ear—the regular tramp, tramp of a footstep crushing down on the hard loose stones. She looked up; was it a dream? Not three yards from her was the tall figure of the man she had been thinking of—the French master! Yes, it really was he! There were his threadbare greenish coat and his tightly-strapped trousers, there was his kind face with its high cheekbones and short-pointed beard. Had he indeed come down from the skies? There seemed no other way, for Susan did not know till afterwards that there were some steps cut zigzag down the cliff just behind her. But wherever he had come from he was undoubtedly there, real flesh and blood, and she was no longer

alone with the dreadful roaring sea. It was such a joyful relief that it gave her new strength; she forgot her bedraggled and woebegone state, and starting up began to try and explain how she had lost herself. Greatly to her own surprise, however, something suddenly choked in her throat, and she was obliged to burst into tears in the middle of her story.

Monsieur looked at the little sobbing figure with much compassion in his face and some dismay, then he touched her frock gently:

"Ciel! how you are wet!" he exclaimed; "and cold too, without doubt, my poor little friend." He fingered the top button of his coat doubtfully, as though wishing to take it off and wrap her in it; but although it was a great-coat there was no other underneath it, and he changed his mind with a little shake of the head.

"Come, then," he said, taking her small cold hand in his, "we will go home together. You are now quite safe, and soon we shall be there. Do not then cry any more."

Susan did her best to stop her tears, and limped along the beach by his side, clinging tightly on to his hand; but she was tired and worn out, and her wet boots were so stiff and pressed so painfully upon her feet, that at last she stumbled and nearly fell. Monsieur looked down at her with concern.

"Ah!" he said, "the road is rough, and the feet are very small. Voyons! An idea comes to me! Instead of going to Madame your aunt, which is so far, we will go to the house of my sister; it is scarcely ten minutes from here. There I leave you, and go to assure Madame of your safety."

If Susan had not been so worn out with fatigue she would have objected strongly to this plan of Monsieur's, for his sister was a perfect stranger to her, and she would much rather have gone home to Aunt Hannah. But, feeling no strength or spirit left to resist anything, she nodded her head silently and suffered him to lift her gently in his arms and carry her up the steps cut in the cliff. How odd it all was! Confused thoughts passed quickly through her mind as she clung fast to the collar of the greenish coat. How kind Monsieur was! how many steps there were, and how very steep! how heavy she was for him to carry, and how he panted as he toiled slowly up! finally, how her dripping clothes pressed against his neatly-brushed garments and made discoloured patches on them. Would the steps never end? But at last, to her great relief, they were at the top, and Monsieur

was once more striding along on level ground, uttering from time to time little sentences in broken English for her encouragement and comfort. They were now in a part of Ramsgate that she did not know at all, quite out of the town, and away from all the tall terraces that faced the sea. The houses were mean and poor, and the streets narrow; now and then came a dingy shop, and in almost every window there was a card with "Apartments" on it. At one of these Monsieur stopped and rang the bell. The door was opened at once, as if someone had been waiting to do so, and a brown-faced, black-eyed lady appeared, who talked very fast in French, and held up her hands at the sight of Monsieur's damp burden. He answered in the same language, calling the lady Delphine, who, chattering all the time, led them down-stairs to a room where there was a good fire burning. Susan wondered to herself why Monsieur and his sister sat in the kitchen, for she saw pots and pans and dishes, all very bright and clean, at one end of the room. The floor was covered with oil-cloth; but by the fire, on which a saucepan hissed and bubbled gently, was spread a bright crimson rug, which made a little spot of comfort. On it there stood a small table neatly laid with preparations for a meal, and a pair of large-sized carpet slippers, carefully tilted so that they might catch the full warmth of the blaze. Sharing this place of honour a fluffy grey cat sat gravely blinking, with its tail curled round its toes. Opposite the table were a rocking-chair and a work-basket, and Susan noticed that someone had been darning a large brown sock.

While she looked at these things from the arm-chair where Monsieur had placed her on his entrance, she also watched the eager face of Delphine who had not ceased to exclaim, to ask questions, to clasp her hands, and otherwise to express great interest and surprise. But it was all in French, as were also Monsieur's patient replies and explanations. Susan could not understand what they said, but she could make out a good deal by Delphine's signs and gestures. It was easy to see that she wished to persuade her brother not to go out again, for when he took up his hat she tried to take it away, and pointed to the bubbling saucepan and warm slippers. Monsieur, however, cast a gently regretful glance at them, shook his head, and presently succeeded in freeing himself from her eager grasp; then, when his steps had ceased to sound upon the stairs, she shrugged her shoulders and said half aloud:

"Certainly it is my brother Adolphe, who has the temper of an angel, and the obstinacy of a pig!"

Chapter Four.

"Half-a-Crown."

Mademoiselle now turned her attention to her guest with many exclamations of pity and endearment. She took off Susan's wet frock, boots, and stockings, rubbed her cold feet and hands, and placed her, wrapped in a large shawl in the rocking-chair close to the fire. Next she poured something out of the saucepan into a little white basin and knelt beside her, saying coaxingly:

"Take this, chérie, it will do you good."

It was Monsieur's soup Susan knew, prepared for his supper, and the saucepan was so small that there could not be much left; it was as bad as taking half his biscuit, and after having been so ungrateful to him, she felt she could not do it.

"No, thank you," she said faintly, turning her head away from Delphine's sharp black eyes and the steaming basin.

But Mademoiselle was a person of authority, and would not have it disputed.

"Mais oui, mais oui," she said impatiently, taking some of the broth in the spoon. "Take it at once, mon enfant, it will do you good."

She looked so determined that Susan, much against her own will, submissively took the spoon and drank the soup. It tasted poor and thin, like hot water with something bitter in it; but she finished it all, and Mademoiselle received the empty basin with a nod of satisfaction. Then she busied herself in examining the condition of Susan's wet clothes, and presently hung them all to dry at a careful distance from the hearth. Susan herself, meanwhile, leaning lazily back in the rocking-chair, began to feel warm and comfortable again; how delicious it was after being so cold and wet and frightened! What would she have done without Monsieur's help? His fire had warmed her, his broth had fed her, his house had sheltered her, and now he had gone out again into the cold night on her service. And yet, she had always been rude and naughty to him. What would Delphine say, Susan wondered, if she knew of it? She did not look as though she had the "temper of an angel" like her

brother. Her black eyes had quick sparkles in them, quite unlike his, which were grey and quiet, shining always with a gentle light. Mademoiselle Delphine looked quite capable of being angry. Susan felt half afraid of her; and yet, it was pleasant to watch her neat movements as she darted swiftly about the room preparing another dish for Adolphe's supper, and Susan kept her eyes fixed on her. At last, her arrangements over, she drew a chair near Susan, and took up her darning; as she did so there was a sudden pattering of rain-drops against the window-pane.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, holding up the brown sock, "that poor Adolphe! How he will be wet!"

This made Susan feel still more guilty, but she could not think of anything to say, and Delphine, who seemed to like talking better than silence, soon began again.

"Always rain, always clouds and mist, and shadow. The sun does not shine here as in our beautiful, bright Paris?"

"Doesn't it ever rain in Paris?" asked Susan.

"Mais certainement, at moments," replied Mademoiselle; "enough to give a charming freshness to the air."

"Why did you come away?" asked Susan, gathering courage.

Delphine dropped the brown sock into her lap, and raised her eyes to the ceiling.

"Mon enfant," she said slowly, "we are exiles! Exiles of poverty."

Susan remembered that Sophia Jane had called Monsieur "a poor egg-sile;" but this way of putting it sounded much better, and she repeated it to herself that she might be able to tell her when she went home.

Meanwhile Mademoiselle bent her eyes on her darning again, and proceeded:

"We were never rich, you see, in Paris, but we had enough to live in a pretty little appartement, very different from this. My brother Adolphe wrote articles for a paper of celebrity on political affairs; he had a great name for them, and if the pay was small it was certain. For me, I was occupied with the cares of the ménage, and we were both content with our lives—often even gay. But trouble came. There was a crise in affaires.

Adolphe's opinions were no longer those of the many; the paper for which he wrote changed its views to suit the world. Adolphe was offered a magnificent sum to change also, and write against his conscience. He lost his post; we became poorer every day. 'Unless you write, Adolphe,' I said to him, 'we starve.' He has a noble heart, my brother, full of honesty and truth. 'I will rather starve,' he replied, 'than write lies.' So after a time we resolved to try our fortune here in this cold, grey England. And we came. Adolphe was to become a Professor of French, but it was long before he found work, and we suffered. Mon Dieu! how we suffered during that first month!"

She paused a moment when she reached this point, and nodded her head several times without speaking, as though words failed her. Susan, who had listened to it all with the most earnest attention, feared she would not go on, and she wanted very much to know what happened next.

"Was it because you had no money?" she asked softly at length.

"My child," said Delphine, her bright eyes moist with tears, which she winked quickly away, "it is a terrible thing to be hungry one's self, but it is far worse to see anyone you love hungry and heart-broken, and yet patient. That is a thing one does not forget. But at last, when we almost despaired, the Bon Dieu sent us a friend. It is a little history which may, perhaps, amuse you; it was like this:—

"One night Adolphe was returning to me to say, as usual, that he could find no place; no one wanted a French master. He had scarcely eaten that day, and for weeks we had neither of us tasted meat, for we lived on what I could make by sewing, and it was very little. Adolphe therefore felt low in spirits and body, for he had walked about all the day, and his heart was heavy. As he passed a butcher's shop near here, the wife, who stood in the doorway, greeted him. He had once bought of her some scraps of meat, such as you English give to your cats and dogs, but which, in hands that understand the French cuisine, can be made to form a ragout of great delicacy.

"'Good evening,' said she; 'and how did the cat like his dinner?'

"My brother removed his hat and bowed, (you may have observed his noble air at such moments), then, drawing himself to his full height:—

"'Madame,' he replied, 'I am the cat!'

"This answer, joined to the graceful manner of Adolphe, struck the good Madame Jones deeply. They at once enter into conversation, and my brother relates to her his vain attempts to find employment. She listens with pity; she gives encouragement. Finally, before they part she forces upon his acceptance two pounds of fillet steak. He returns to me with the meat enveloped in a cabbage leaf, and that night we satisfy our hunger with appetising food, and our hearts are full of gratitude to Heaven and this good Madame Jones. And from that time," finished Mademoiselle holding up one hand with the sock stretched upon it, "things mend. Madame Jones recommends Adolphe to Madame, your aunt; she again tells others of him, and he has now, enough to do. We are hungry no longer. It is not very gay in the appartement; the sun does not shine much, but we are together. Some day, who knows? we may be able to return to our dear Paris. One must have courage." She stooped and kissed Susan's upturned face, which was full of sympathy.

"If she knew how badly I've always behaved to Monsieur she wouldn't have done that," thought Susan penitently.

"There now rests one great wish in Adolphe's heart," continued Delphine, "and that is, to be able some day to reward Madame Jones for her goodness. Strangers, and without money, she fed and cheered us, and it is to her we owe our success. Never could either of us be so basely ungrateful as to forget that if we are again blessed by prosperity. Often has Adolphe, who is a fine English scholar, repeated to me the lines of your poet, Shakespeare:—

"Freeze, freeze thou winter sky;
Thou dost not bite so nigh
As benefits forgot."

Susan had remained wide awake in spite of great fatigue during the whole of Mademoiselle's story; but now, when she came to the poetry, which she repeated with difficulty and very slowly, there seemed to be something lulling in her voice. The room was warm too, and presently the sounds in it got mixed up together. The crackling of the fire, the bubbling of the saucepan, and Delphine's tones, joined in a sort of lullaby. Susan's eyelids gently closed, and she was fast asleep. So fast that the next thing she knew was that Buskin had somehow arrived and was carrying her upstairs; that Monsieur was in attendance with a candle, and that a cab was waiting at the door. But having noticed this, it was quite easy to go to sleep

again, and she scarcely awoke when they arrived at Aunt Hannah's and she was put to bed.

So it was not till broad daylight the next morning that she began to think over her adventures, and to remember all the wonderful things that had happened the day before. And in particular all the details of Delphine's story came back to her, and the earnest gratitude with which she had talked of Mrs Jones' kindness. "'Strangers, and without money, she fed and cheered us.' Now that is just exactly what Monsieur did for me when I first saw him," thought Susan; "and all I've done in return is to laugh at him and give him trouble. I haven't been grateful at all." The more she considered her conduct the more ashamed she began to feel, and she could not help wondering what Mademoiselle Delphine would think of her if she knew. "At any rate," she resolved, "I won't do it any more. I never will laugh at lesson-time, and I'll learn everything quite perfectly and be as good as ever I can, whatever Sophia Jane likes to say." Sophia Jane, that naughty, badly behaved child! After all, it was her fault that Susan had done wrong, she went on to think, and it was also her fault that she had lost herself yesterday, because she had been so disagreeable about the Enemy and the basket. It was a comfort to be able to shift the blame on Sophia Jane's shoulder, for Susan liked to think well of herself, and she began to feel more cheerful and satisfied as she dressed and went down-stairs. Here Nanna and Margareta were prepared with all manner of questions about Monsieur, his house, and his sister, but Susan was quite determined to tell them very little. She repeated gravely, "They were very kind, and I like them very much;" and this was most unsatisfactory to her listeners, who craved for the tiniest details of her adventure. Sophia Jane alone sat mute, but sharply attentive to all that passed, hunching up her shoulders and fixing her blue eyes on each speaker in turn. She was, as usual, in disgrace Susan and, and had been forbidden to speak at meals; but as soon as breakfast was over she made the best use of the hour before lessons began, and examined her companion narrowly:

"Whatever makes you look so solemn?" she asked at last.

"I'm not going to laugh at Monsieur La Roche ever again," said Susan solemnly. "I've made a good resolution."

"What for?" asked Sophia Jane.

"Because he's been very kind, and it's wrong to laugh at him," answered Susan.

Sophia Jane made a face that Susan very much disliked, it was so full of contempt.

"He hasn't been kind to me, and I don't care if it is wrong," she said. "I shall do as I like."

"But I want you not to either," said Susan.

"I don't care a bit. Why should I?" asked Sophia Jane, who was evidently in one of her most reckless moods.

Susan was silent. There was not much reason certainly that Sophia Jane should wish to please her; then a bright idea came into her head.

"If you'll promise not to laugh at French lessons," she said, "I'll give you a new head for your doll as soon as I've got enough money."

Sophia Jane considered this offer with her head on one side; then she asked:

"What price?"

"Half-a-crown," answered Susan, "and that will buy the very best you can get."

"Well," said Sophia Jane slowly, "I promise."

"But if you whisper, or make faces, or nudge me with your elbow you won't have it," added Susan hastily.

"You didn't say all that at first," said Sophia Jane; "but I *will* promise."

So the agreement was made, and moreover written down in Susan's best printing hand, and signed by Sophia Jane. Even then Susan felt by no means sure of the result, for it was so much more natural to her companion to be naughty than good.

Thursday came, and Monsieur La Roche also at his usual hour; Susan put on her most discreet behaviour, and kept anxious watch over Sophia Jane. But there was no need for anxiety, her conduct was perfect, and she not only preserved the strictest gravity, but also showed the most marvellous quickness in learning her lessons. Though she might be a naughty child, no one could accuse her of being a dull one; she grasped the meaning of anything like lightning, and while Susan was

steadily bringing her mind to bear on a French verb, Sophia Jane knew it already, and could repeat it without a mistake. She showed indeed such zeal and attention throughout the lessons, that it had a sobering effect even upon Nanna and Margaretta, who were so employed in wondering at her that they did not giggle nearly so much as usual.

Monsieur himself was not less surprised at this sudden improvement in his class, and above all in Sophia Jane, who had, without question, been his worst and most backward pupil. When his lesson was finished he beamed kindly at her and said, "It is *tr-rès* bien, mademoiselle. I am much pleased with you to-day."

It was such a new thing for anyone to be much pleased with Sophia Jane that it hardly seemed possible, and everyone stared at her. Aunt Hannah turned round from her chair at the fireside to see who had deserved this praise. Sophia Jane! It was an unheard-of thing. The child herself was so unused to the sound of kindness and approval, that it startled her as though she had received a blow. She reddened, gave all her features a sudden twist, and blinked her eyes at Monsieur for an answer.

"Sit straight, Sophia Jane, and don't make faces," said Aunt Hannah, and the well-known accents of blame at once restored her to her usual state. The moment Monsieur was gone she was the old Sophia Jane again, tiresome and disobedient as ever. And Susan, remembering the compact about the half-crown, was not surprised at this, for, she thought to herself, "she's not really doing it because she wants to be good, but because she wants a new head for the doll." It was quite possible, therefore, still to feel that she was much better than her companion, and this was not unpleasant.

Meanwhile she was much looking forward to seeing Mademoiselle Delphine again, for Aunt Hannah intended to pay her a visit soon to thank her for her kindness, and she had promised to take both the little girls with her. Grace, the doll, must also be fetched home, for Susan had been too sleepy to remember her, and had left her behind. Monsieur's house was found with some difficulty, but at length Sophia Jane's sharp eyes spied a dusty card in a window with "Monsieur La Roche, Professor of French," written on it, and they knew that this must be the right one. Susan wondered whether Mademoiselle would quickly open the door herself as she had done before, but this time a very untidy maid-servant appeared with smudges on her face. There were many other lodgers in the house beside Monsieur and his sister, who had the cheapest rooms of all, an

underground one which Susan had thought to be the kitchen, and two tiny attics in the roof. They found Mademoiselle waiting to receive them with a yellow ribbon at her neck, and a manner full of gracious affability. Gambetta sat on the hearth, and the room was perfectly neat and clean, but by daylight; it wanted the air of snugness and comfort which Susan remembered. There was a very tiny fire, and it all looked bare and cold, for the window was so placed that the sunlight could not possibly enter. Mademoiselle partly made up, however, for the dreariness of her lodging by smiles and pleasant conversation. She was delighted to see them all, and to renew her acquaintance with Susan, chattering so fast that Sophia Jane had plenty of time to notice everything, and presently fixed her eyes, full of admiration, on Gambetta, who sat with rather a vexed look on his face by the small fire.

Presently he rose, stretched himself, humped his back, and then jumped up on his mistress' lap.

"Fi donc!" said she, settling her knees more comfortably for him.

"That is a fine cat," remarked Aunt Hannah; "a great pet, no doubt?"

"You say truly, Madame," replied Delphine gently rubbing Gambetta under the chin; "but above all with my brother. I may say that Gambetta is the pupil of his eye. How often have I made him reproaches because he will leave the best of his potage, and pour it in the saucer for this cat! And that in the days when there was not too much potage, look you, for either of us. On his side the animal adores Adolphe. He knows his step, he has his little pleasantries for him, and his caresses. When my brother arrives at night tired, and perhaps a little dejected, it is Gambetta who knows how to cheer him. And then, he reminds us of Paris, he is the only thing of value we brought from there. He is an exile as well as we, and has shared our fortunes."

"No wonder you are so fond of him," said Aunt Hannah; "but I see he has no collar. Are you not afraid of losing such a valuable cat?"

"That is often in my mind," replied Mademoiselle. "I fear it may arrive some day, for at times he makes long courses. The next time we have a little money to spare we will buy him one, and cause the address to be graved upon it."

Both Susan and Sophia Jane listened with much interest to all this, and the latter was particularly impressed by it; she looked from Delphine's expressive face to Gambetta's when the collar was mentioned, and seemed about to ask a question, but checked herself suddenly. Grace being now produced from a table drawer, it was found that Mademoiselle's clever fingers had actually made for her a new bonnet, a most elegant one, of drawn grey silk. While Susan was admiring it, Delphine turned to Sophia Jane:

"And the leetle companion?" she said, "has she also a poupée?"

Sophia Jane hung her head, and looked rather ashamed. "Only one without a head," she muttered.

"Ah! that is sad indeed," said Mademoiselle. "It is impossible to fashion a bonnet for a lady without a head, is it not? But when you have a new one, I will also make her a bonnet like this. I have yet some more silk."

Susan could not help giving a glance full of meaning at her companion, but Sophia Jane did not respond to it, except by a dark frown.

"When Mademoiselle La Roche is so kind, Sophia Jane," said Aunt Hannah, "the least you can do is to thank her and look pleasant. You never see Susan frown like that."

On the way home there was a great deal to be said about Mademoiselle Delphine, and Susan was so delighted with Grace's new bonnet that she could not repeat too often how kind it was of her to have made it.

"And aren't you glad she's going to make one for you too?" she asked.

Sophia Jane had been unusually silent and thoughtful since they had started, and made absent replies to all Susan's remarks. She seemed to be turning something over in her mind, and the question had to be repeated before she took any notice. Then she only answered calmly:

"Oh, yes, of course," as if it were the very merest trifle, and she had presents every day, which was by no means the case. Susan looked curiously at her, there were often moments when she did not know what to make of Sophia Jane. Then she said:

"Shall I ask Aunt Hannah to let us stop and look up at Miss Powter's window?"

Miss Powter kept a toy-shop in the High Street, and only a few days ago had shown in her window quite a collection of dolls' heads, both china and wax.

"If you like," said Sophia Jane indifferently.

Susan ran up to Aunt Hannah, who was walking a little way in front, and put her request, which being granted, the little girls were soon gazing in at Mrs Powter's shop-front. The heads were still there, a long row of them, some fair, some dark, some with blue eyes, some with black.

"Now, which should you choose?" asked Susan with much interest; "a wax or a china one?"

"A wax one," said Sophia Jane; "because I could brush her hair."

"But you couldn't wash her," objected Susan; "and china wears best."

Sophia Jane did not seem disposed to linger long, though generally she was never tired of Miss Powter's window. She did not enter into the matter with nearly enough spirit to please Susan, who as they walked on suggested:

"If I were you I should have that one—the last in the row, with fair hair. She's rather like Grace, and you see, as their bonnets will be alike, we might call them sisters."

"If I buy a head at all perhaps I may," was Sophia's puzzling remark.

"Well, but you're sure to," said Susan. "Next week I shall have the half-crown, and we can go and choose it together. You mean to, don't you?"

"Perhaps I do and perhaps I don't," answered Sophia Jane, and could not be induced to say more on the subject.

Certainly she would win that half-crown easily, for her behaviour to Monsieur La Roche was worthy of all praise. Susan even began to think that she was overdoing it a little, for she was now beyond all the others in the class. Earnest effort, and a naturally quick intelligence joined to it, produced such good

results that Monsieur had now a habit of turning to Sophia Jane when he asked an unusually difficult question. Could it be entirely for the sake of the half-crown that she made these extraordinary exertions? Susan began to feel jealous of her companion's progress and a little ill-used; for although she tried hard to please Monsieur, it was quite evident that the pupil he was most proud of was Sophia Jane. "If he knew," thought Susan to herself, "why she does it, perhaps he wouldn't be so pleased. And I don't suppose she'll take so much trouble when once she's got the money."

It was a very new thing for Sophia Jane to be more praised than herself; and though Susan would not perhaps have acknowledged that she was sorry to see her good behaviour, it yet made her feel uncomfortable when Monsieur looked so very pleased with her. She had fully intended to be his model pupil herself, an example to all the others, and it was disappointing to give up that place to one whom she had considered so far beneath her. Besides this, it was a little difficult when the time came to part with the half-crown. It would only leave sixpence in her purse—Maria's lucky sixpence with a hole in it—and that she did not want to spend. It was comforting, however, to remember that her birthday was near, when her mother would certainly send her some money as a present. And she was really anxious for Sophia Jane to have a doll to play with, and it would be nice to go and see Mademoiselle Delphine again about the bonnet; and finally, a bargain was a bargain, and decidedly the half-crown had been fairly earned. So, all these things considered, she cheerfully counted out one shilling, two sixpences, and six pennies, and went to look for Sophia Jane.

She was in the sitting-room alone, seated in Aunt Hannah's large arm-chair with an open book in her lap which she was intently studying.

"Here's your money," said Susan, plunging at once into the business on hand.

Sophia Jane neither answered or took the least notice; but as this was often a tiresome way of hers Susan was not surprised, and only repeated a little louder:

"Here's your money!"

Sophia Jane looked up from her book, which Susan now saw to be a French grammar, and said, holding out her hand:

"Give it to me."

"You ought to say 'Thank you,'" remarked Susan in the reproving voice she often used to her companion.

Sophia Jane counted the coins carefully, going twice through the pennies to be sure there were the right number. Then she said shortly:

"It's all right."

"Of course it's right!" cried Susan indignantly. But it was not of the least use to be angry with Sophia Jane; she was now dropping the pieces of money one by one into her pocket with a thoughtful air, and seemed hardly to know that Susan was there. The latter waited a moment and then said:

"Shall I ask Aunt Hannah if we may go to Miss Powter's this afternoon?"

"What for?" asked Sophia Jane.

"What for!" repeated Jane in extreme astonishment. "Why, of course, now you've got the money, you'll go and buy the head."

Sophia Jane took up her grammar again and bent her eyes doggedly upon it.

"I'm not going to buy a head," she answered.

This decided reply was so unexpected that for the moment Susan was speechless; for on the whole Sophia Jane had seemed to look forward to the purchase, and they had made many plans together about it, so that she had come to think of it as a settled thing. It made her feel injured and disappointed to be thrust out of the matter in this sudden way, for if the head was not to be bought how would Sophia Jane spend the money? She evidently had some secret plan of her own in which Susan was not to share. With a rising colour in her face she said at last:

"I don't think that's fair."

"It's my money, and I shall do as I like with it," was Sophia Jane's only reply.

"But I shouldn't have given it you," said Susan hotly, "unless you were going to buy a head."

Sophia Jane chuckled. "Well, I've got it now," she said, "and I shall keep it."

"What a naughty, selfish, disagreeable little girl she was!" thought Susan as she stood looking angrily at her.

"What are you going to do with it?" she asked.

"That's a secret," said Sophia Jane, chinking the money gently in her pocket.

"I believe," said Susan, now irritated beyond endurance, "that you mean to spend it all on Billy Stokes' day."

Billy Stokes was a man who came round once a week selling sweetmeats, and it was Sophia Jane's custom to spend her pennies in this way when she had any.

"If you do," continued Susan, getting more cross every moment, "you'll be dreadfully greedy, and most likely you'll make yourself ill."

Sophia Jane only smiled gently and settled herself more comfortably in her chair.

"And I suppose you remember," said Susan, whose voice became louder and more defiant with each sentence, "that if you don't get the head you can't have the bonnet."

The last word was almost shrieked, for she had now quite lost her temper, and at this moment Margaretta looked into the room. Now it was always taken for granted by the household that in any dispute Sophia Jane must be in the wrong; so now Margaretta came at once to this conclusion, in spite of Susan's hot and angry looks.

"How can you be so naughty, Sophia Jane," she said, "as to quarrel with a sweet-tempered child like Susan? You must have been very unkind and tiresome to vex her so much."

Neither of the little girls spoke, for Susan was still feeling too angry, and Sophia Jane took a scolding as a matter of course.

"If you don't say you're sorry," pursued Margaretta, "I sha'n't take you out with me this afternoon. I don't wish to have a sulky little girl with me. Susan shall go alone."

There was no word from Sophia Jane, or even any sign of having heard this speech. At another time Susan would have said something in her defence, for she knew this blame to be entirely unjust. But just now she was so vexed with her that she kept silence, and allowed Margaretta to go on without interruption.

"Very well," said the latter, "then you stay at home by yourself. Aunt and Nanna are going to see Mrs Bevis, and Susan and I shall have a walk together. Very likely we should call in at Buzzard's as we come back and have some tarts."

Susan glanced at her companion's face to see how she took this last remark. Buzzard's open tarts were things that Sophia Jane specially liked. Was she vexed? No. One corner of her mouth was tucked in, in a way which looked far more like secret satisfaction. It was very annoying, but after all she could not prefer to be left alone in the dull house that bright day, so most likely she was concealing her disappointment.

Susan herself did not enjoy that walk so much as usual, though the band was playing gay tunes, and the sun shone, and the sea twinkled merrily. For one thing she felt that she had been unjust to Sophia Jane, and allowed her to be punished for no fault; for, after all, it was her money, and she had a right to do as she liked with it. Only why should she be so perverse and stupid as to have a will of her own, and not to carry out Susan's wishes? What could she possibly be going to do with that half-crown? What could it be that she wanted so much that she was ready to give up all the nice games and plans they had thought of together? As she walked soberly along by Margaretta's side Susan came to the conclusion that it would be best to make no more inquiries about it; she had noticed that Sophia Jane would seldom yield to persuasion and never to force, but sometimes if you left her quite alone she would do what you wished of her own accord. This once settled in her mind she felt more cheerful, but the walk was dull with no one but Margaretta to talk to, the open tarts at Buzzard's had lost their flavour, and she was not at all sorry to get home.

To do Sophia Jane justice she was quite ready to meet Susan's advances in a friendly spirit, and did not seem disposed to bear malice. The little girls played together as usual, and Susan, true to her resolution, made not the smallest reference to the half-crown, but this silence made her think of it all the more. It was, indeed, seldom out of her mind, and every day her curiosity grew more intense; morning, noon, and night she wondered about that half-crown, and at last her head was so full of it that

she mixed it up with everything she did in lessons or play-time. And at last, one day when she and Sophia Jane were reading aloud to Aunt Hannah, a new idea, and she thought a very good one, was suggested to her.

In the lesson there happened to be an account of a miser, who lived in a wretched hovel, went without sufficient clothing, and almost starved himself for the sake of hoarding money; everyone thought him poor, but after his death it was found that he had lots of gold and silver coins hidden away in the mattress of his bed.

"What makes people misers?" asked Susan, when she came to the end of this history.

"Love of money, my dear," answered Aunt Hannah.

"Is every one who saves up money a miser?" continued Susan.

"No. Because they may be saving it for a wise and good purpose; but if they hide it up as this man did, and only keep it for the pleasure of looking at it, then they certainly would be called misers."

"Are there any now?" asked Susan, fixing her eyes on Sophia Jane.

"Oh, yes, I daresay there are, plenty," answered Aunt Hannah, who was getting tired of the subject. "Now, get your geography books."

But during the rest of the lesson Susan's mind was very far away, and she made all kinds of stupid mistakes, for what she was thinking of had nothing to do with the map of England. It was something much more interesting and important; for quite suddenly, while reading about the misers, an idea relating to Sophia Jane and the half-crown had darted into her head. She had hidden it away somewhere, and did not mean to spend it at all. The manner in which she had chinked those coins in her pocket and counted them over, and her secret and crafty behaviour since, all pointed to this. The next question was, "*Where* had she hidden it?" What mysterious hole had she found unknown to anyone? Susan ran over all the possible places in her mind, and was earnestly occupied in this when Aunt Hannah suddenly asked her a question:

"Where is the town of Croydon?"

"In the attic," answered Susan hurriedly, and then flushed up and gave a guilty look at Sophia Jane, who merely stared in amazement.

"My dear Susan," said Aunt Hannah, "you are strangely inattentive this morning. I can't let you play in the attic if you think of your games during lesson-time."

As the days passed, Susan, watching her companion narrowly, felt more and more certain that her suspicions were correct. True, she never saw her retire to the attic alone to count over and rejoice in her secret hoard, which real misers were always known to do; but there was this to be remarked: *she bought nothing of Billy Stokes*. When Susan saw her look wistfully at the cocoa-nut rock, and twisted sticks of sugar-candy, and remembered all those pennies, she asked:

"Which are you going to buy?"

"None of 'em," said Sophia Jane, turning away. And now Susan doubted no longer. Sophia Jane was a miser!

Sunday came soon after this. It was a day the children never liked much, because, for several reasons, it was dull. Aunt Hannah did not allow them either to play at their usual games or to read their usual books. Grace was put away, the attic was forbidden, and they had to be very quiet; the only books considered "fit for Sunday," were *Line upon Line*, *The Peep of Day*, *The Dairyman's Daughter* and *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Bits of this last were always interesting, and the more so because it was a large old copy with big print and plenty of pictures throughout. That of Saul raising Samuel had a never-ceasing attraction for Susan, and Sophia Jane was fond of the part about Giant Despair and his grievous crab-tree cudgel. In the morning they all went with Aunt Hannah to chapel, which was only five minutes' walk from the house; the prayers were long, and they could seldom understand the sermon, though they had to listen to it because Aunt Hannah asked them questions about it afterwards.

Mr Bevis, the minister, who was a great friend of hers, often came to Belmont Cottage, and stayed to have tea. On these occasions it was difficult to Susan to think that he really was the same man who wore a long black gown on Sundays, and white bands under his chin, and often hit the red cushion so hard that she had seen dust rise from it. His voice was quite different, all mystery had left him, and he became just a common grey-haired gentleman, eating muffins and asking for more sugar in

his tea. She was afraid sometimes that he would ask her some questions about his sermons, or perhaps where some text came from out of the Bible, but he never did so, and indeed took very little notice of the children. On this Sunday they were surprised to find, when the time came up for the sermon, that it was not Mr Bevis that was going to preach. A much younger man mounted the steep stairs into the pulpit, and gave out a text about the widow's mite, and Susan began to listen attentively to the sermon which followed, for, strangely enough, it was all about "giving." How exactly suited to Sophia Jane!

"To give," said the minister at the close of the sermon, "though it leaves a man poor, yet makes him rich; but to keep and hoard up treasure, though he be called wealthy, yet makes him exceeding poor. But the thing given need not be money; it may only be a kind effort, a forgiving word, a little trouble for some one, but if love go with it, then it becomes great and worthy at once, for it is part of the giver's very self. It is not what a man gives, but how he gives it, that matters. Gold and silver coming from a full purse and a cold heart, is a barren gift compared to the widow's mite, which was 'all she had.'

"Not what we give, but what we share,
For the gift without the giver is bare.'"

On the way home Aunt Hannah talked about the sermon a good deal with Nanna and Margaretta, for it was rather an event to hear a stranger at the chapel. She said that the preacher was "original," but that she did not consider it a "Gospel" sermon, and preferred Mr Bevis; she doubted also whether the lines quoted at the end were from a sacred writer. Now these lines were just what Susan remembered best; they came into her head again and again that afternoon while she was learning a hymn by heart, and it was difficult not to mix the two up together. She was also occupied with wondering whether Sophia Jane had attended to the sermon, and would alter her mind about the half-crown. That was as mysterious as ever, and Sophia Jane's pointed little face told nothing, though Susan fancied that there was a softer look upon it now and then, and an expression as of secret satisfaction.

Chapter Five.

"O what a tangled web we weave,
When first we practise to deceive!"

Susan's mind was very full of all this, and she was still watching her companion with suspicion, when something happened which gave her thoughts a new direction; for shortly after the strange minister had preached at the chapel, Sophia Jane became very ill. She had been ailing for some time, and had refused to join Susan in their usual games; complaining of headache, but no one had taken much notice of this; she was so often perverse and tiresome that it was natural to think her only sulky when she sat about in corners with her head propped on her hand and her eyes closed. But at last Aunt Hannah called in the doctor, and after his visit she looked very grave, and talked in a low voice to Buskin. Susan could not hear all she said, but she gathered enough to know that the doctor thought Sophia Jane very ill, and that he could not yet say what sort of illness it would be. She longed to ask some questions about it, but she knew from the worried look on Aunt Hannah's face that it would be better to wait, so she took Grace and stole upstairs to Sophia Jane's door. She had been put to bed in a small inner room opening out of Aunt Hannah's, which was rather apart from the other bed-rooms, and had a little flight of stairs all to itself. On these stairs Susan took up her post, and listened anxiously to the sounds within; the door was a little open and she could hear her aunt giving some orders to Buskin, who presently came hurriedly out, nearly tumbling over her in her haste.

"Gracious me, miss! find some other place to sit in, do," she said crossly clutching at the balusters.

"What's the matter with Sophia Jane?" asked Susan. But Buskin only muttered to herself, rubbed her elbow, and went quickly on. Susan wished they would let her go in and sit with Sophia Jane. She would be very useful and quiet, she thought to herself; she was quite used to that when Freddie had bad headaches. She wished now that she had not called her companion cross and stupid so often lately; but perhaps tomorrow she would be better, and then she would tell her she was sorry. Just then Nanna came up, and not being so full of business as Buskin, was able to answer a few questions. From her Susan learned that Dr Martin thought Sophia Jane was sickening from a fever of some kind; perhaps, if it did not prove infectious, Susan would be allowed to see her sometimes.

"What is infectious?" asked Susan.

"Anything you can catch," answered Nanna.

"If it's scarlet fever, or measles, or anything of that kind, I should think aunt will send you away."

"Where to?" asked Susan in alarm.

"Oh, I don't know," replied Nanna; "anywhere. But I can't stay now, I have to go to the chemist's for aunt."

She went down-stairs, and Susan was left to her own thoughts. She hoped that Aunt Hannah would not send her away, for she felt sure she could be of great use in nursing Sophia Jane if they would only let her try. And where could she be sent? Perhaps to stay with Mrs Bevis, the minister's wife, who lived in a dull house near the chapel with no children but only Mr Bevis. The idea was an alarming one, but it did not trouble her long, for when Dr Martin called the next morning he declared the illness to be a low fever, and not in the least infectious; there was no necessity, he said, for Susan to leave the house, though she ought not be much in the sick-room. After this she was allowed to do very much as she liked; the days passed as they had done in London when Freddie was so ill, for the thought of every one in the house was fixed on the patient. Suddenly, from utter insignificance Sophia Jane was raised to importance. Her whims and fancies, once unheeded, were now attended to with care; the least change in her condition was marked with interest, and her name was in every one's mouth, spoken softly and with kindness. Poor little Sophia Jane! She had not much strength, Dr Martin said, to fight against this attack; it was a serious matter for any one so frail and weak, and she must be carefully nursed. Every one did their best. Aunt Hannah sat up at night with her, and in the day-time while she rested, Nanna and Margaretta took turns to be in the sick-room. Buskin bent her whole mind on beef-tea, broth, and jelly, became shorter in her speech, and less inclined to answer questions as the days went on. Only Susan, in spite of her most earnest wish, was not allowed to go into Sophia Jane's room, and found there was very little she could do to help. She had no opportunity, therefore, of telling her companion that she was sorry for her past unkindness; she could only sit on the stairs outside her room ready to carry messages when wanted, watching for the visits of the doctor, and trying to gather from the expression of his face whether Sophia Jane were better.

It was hard to be left out when every one else was doing something, and at last Susan bethought herself that Grace might be a comfort to the invalid, and sent her in by Nanna. To

her disappointment, however, she brought the doll back almost directly, dropped it into Susan's lap, and said:

"She's too ill to take any notice of it."

Too ill to take any notice of Grace dressed in her new bonnet, Sophia Jane must indeed be unlike herself. Perhaps her head ached very badly like Freddie's. "How I wish they would let me help with the bandages!" sighed Susan to herself. Day after day followed, till Sophia Jane had been ill a week. No improvement. The fever did not leave her; each morning she seemed a little weaker and less able to bear it, and each morning Aunt Hannah's face looked graver and more conscious, so that Susan did not like to ask the question always in her mind, "May I see Sophia Jane to-day?"

One afternoon, however, she was in her usual place on the stairs reading when the door behind her opened, and some one said softly, "Susan." She looked up; Aunt Hannah stood there beckoning her to come in.

"You may see Sophia Jane for five minutes," she said; "she wants to ask you something. You must promise her to do whatever she wishes, and speak very gently."

Susan followed on tip-toe through the first room, where there were medicine bottles and a strong smell of vinegar, into the second. She looked timidly towards the bed and felt as though she should see a stranger there and not Sophia Jane. This was almost the case, for the little figure sitting propped up with pillows had nothing familiar about it. Her hair had been cut quite short, and stood up in spikes all over her head, there was a burning pink flush on each cheek, and her eyes glistened like two steel beads.

"My darling," said Aunt Hannah soothingly, as she led Susan forward, "here is Susan, tell her what you wish, and then you must lie down quietly and go to sleep, as you promised."

What a different voice Aunt Hannah had now that Sophia Jane was ill! And she had called her "darling!" Such a thing had never happened before!

But Sophia Jane took no notice of the caressing tone: she waved her hand fretfully as Aunt Hannah bent over her, and the gesture said more plainly than words, "Go away, and let me speak to her." Everything seemed strangely altered, for, to

Susan's surprise, Aunt Hannah meekly obeyed, went into the next room, and shut the door.

At this Sophia Jane put out a hand about the size of a canary's claw, and caught hold of Susan's sleeve:

"It's behind the big box in the attic!" she said, in a small hoarse voice. Of course it was the half-crown, but Susan was so confused by the eager gaze fixed on her, that she only said:

"What is?"

"A parcel. Done up in newspaper. For Madmozal. You must give it her."

Susan nodded.

"Soon," said Sophia Jane, with a feeble pull at the sleeve.

"To-morrow, if I can," answered Susan earnestly. "What shall I say to her?"

Sophia Jane's fingers let go their hold, her head drooped on the pillows, and she closed her eyes; but she murmured something as she did so, and, bending down to listen, Susan heard:

"A collar for his cat."

"Come away, my dear," said Aunt Hannah's voice. "She is too tired to talk any more. Perhaps she will sleep now."

Susan went softly out of the room and sat down in her old place on the stairs. So this was how Sophia Jane had spent the half-crown! How differently to anything Susan had imagined. Instead of being miserly and selfish, she was generous and self-sacrificing—instead of her own pleasure, she had preferred to give pleasure to Monsieur. And why? Because he had been kind to her. He was the only person, Susan remembered, who had ever praised Sophia Jane, or had looked at her as though he liked her; and so, in return, she had given him her very best—all she had. As she considered this she grew more and more sorry to think how she had despised her poor little companion, and suspected her of being mean; how she had always joined Margaretta and Nanna in blaming and laughing at her, and how ready she had been to say, "It's Sophia Jane's fault." She longed more than ever now to be able to tell her how sorry she was for all this, and resolved very earnestly that when she got well she would never behave unkindly to her again. Meanwhile,

there was the collar—she would go and look for it at once, so that on the first opportunity she might take it to Mademoiselle Delphine. She could not give it to Monsieur, for his lessons had been discontinued since Sophia Jane's illness.

She went up to the attic which she and Sophia Jane had made their play-room, and where they had had such merry games together. How deserted and cheerless it looked! Everything seemed to know that Sophia Jane was ill. It was late in the afternoon, dark, and gloomy; there was never too much light in the attic at the brightest of times, and now it was so shadowy and dull that Susan shivered as she glanced round it. There was the dusty roll of wall-paper leaning up in one corner; there was the thin, bent, old poker, which had somehow a queer likeness to Sophia Jane; there was the body of the poor doll, still headless and forlorn, stretched on the floor; and there, under the cobwebby window, was the big black box. Behind that was what she had come to seek—the collar.

Susan knelt on the top of the box, and, peering down, could plainly see the parcel jammed tightly between it and the wall. It was too far for her to reach, but presently with the help of the poker she got it up, and proceeded to examine it, quite breathless with excitement. The newspaper had been partly torn away from it already, and soon the collar itself was in her hands. She gave an exclamation of delight. It was a pretty collar! Not only was it made of brass and lined with bright scarlet leather, but at the side was fastened a little round bell which gave a charming tinkle. The very present of all others which Susan would have chosen herself for Monsieur—if she had thought of it. But it was not her present at all; it was Sophia Jane who had thought of it, and of course it was very good of her. And yet—she went on to think, turning the collar round and round—Sophia Jane couldn't have bought it if I hadn't given her that half-crown. It *really* is as much my present as hers, but Monsieur and Mademoiselle won't ever know anything about that. It was not nice of Sophia Jane to keep it all to herself; if she had told me I should have said, "Let me pay half," and then we could have given it together. I liked Monsieur and Mademoiselle before she did.

Every moment, as she looked at the pretty collar, Susan's thoughts became more and more jealous and unjust; she almost forgot her companion's illness and what she had asked her to do, in the sense that she herself had been hardly treated; she forgot, too, all her resolves to behave more kindly. As she sat thus, the shadows grew deeper and deeper in the attic until

it became almost dark, and looking up, she could only see one thing quite distinctly: it was the body of Sophia Jane's doll. There it lay without a head—it would most likely never have one now; it had a sad deserted look, and yet it reminded her as nothing else would have done of her promise half an hour ago. She seemed to see Sophia Jane's eager little face, to hear her whisper "soon," and to feel the clasp of her weak fingers. Better feelings came back, to her. She put her jealous thoughts aside with a struggle, and as she wrapped up the collar again determined that to-morrow, if possible, she would take it to Mademoiselle and tell her. It was Sophia Jane's present.

Strange dreams visited Susan that night: sometimes she saw Gambetta's comfortable furry face, which seemed to smile smugly at her; and then it changed; and there was Sophia Jane frowning angrily, with terribly bright eyes. The first thing she saw when she woke in the morning was the collar, which she had put on a chair by her bedside, and she at once remembered what she was to do that day. As she dressed herself she could not help the wish returning strongly that it was to be her present as well as Sophia Jane's. How well Gambetta would look in it, and how delighted Mademoiselle would be! And this time nothing happened to check those reflections, so that by the time she went down-stairs they filled her mind entirely.

Aunt Hannah looked much more cheerful this morning. Sophia Jane had slept quietly for some hours, and the fever was less; it was the first improvement she had seen.

She was quite ready to consent when Susan asked if she might go to see Mademoiselle.

"Certainly," she said; "Margaretta shall take you, and, if convenient to Mademoiselle La Roche, you can stay there an hour or so. Perhaps she will bring you back herself in the afternoon; if not, I will manage to send Buskin."

So it was settled, and at twelve o'clock they set forth, the precious parcel tucked under Susan's arm, and reminding her every moment of her promise to Sophia Jane. Mademoiselle was not there when they arrived; she was generally out at this hour, the woman of the house said, but would certainly return before long. Susan, therefore, was left with Aunt Hannah's note to wait her coming, while Margaretta hastened back at once. There was no one in the room but Gambetta, who sat stiffly upright in Monsieur's arm-chair blinking his yellow eyes. Susan went up to him, scratched his head, and made some friendly advances, but he took very little notice of her. He evidently kept his

"pleasantries," as Mademoiselle called them, for his friends, and would not waste them on strangers. How soft and thick his fur was! particularly just at the neck, where it stood out in a sort of ruff. How would he look in the new collar, and would it fit him properly? He had such a large neck. It would surely be a good plan to put the collar on, so that Mademoiselle might have all the pleasure of a great surprise when she came in. It was such a splendid idea, and there was so much risk of her arriving too soon, that Susan's fingers quite trembled with excitement as she unwrapped the newspaper. As she did so, the little bell tinkled, and Gambetta looked up in lazy surprise at the noise close to his ears. "Pretty puss," said Susan coaxingly, and she quickly slipped the collar over his head and fastened the strap. It fitted beautifully, and though it gave Gambetta a somewhat constrained air, like that of a gentleman with too tight a shirt collar, it was certainly very becoming, and made him look like a cat of dignity and high rank. It was hardly done, and Susan still stood with clasped hands admiring his appearance, when Mademoiselle's quick step and quicker chatter were heard on the stairs. In a moment she hurried in with a neat basket on her arm, and her face alive with eagerness. She chattered so fast in French and English that it was some minutes before Susan could present her aunt's note, and when Mademoiselle had read that, she had still more to say. For in one breath she was charmed to see Susan, and in the next desolated to hear that Sophia Jane was ill, and she flew from one subject to the other with such astonishing rapidity that Susan gave up trying to follow her, and waited patiently till she should have leisure to notice Gambetta. And at length he drew attention to himself, for evidently feeling neglected, he opened his mouth and uttered a tiny plaintive mew. Mademoiselle looked round at once at her favourite, and her eye fell on the new decoration.

"Mais—ciel!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands. She was a person of such quick thoughts and impulses that, waiting for no explanation, she at once took for granted that Susan had given the collar, and poured out her delighted thanks mingled with caresses. It was really difficult to get in a word, though Susan several times tried to begin the sentence, "It's Sophia Jane's present;" but the words were choked by hugs and kisses, and she said to herself, "I'll tell her presently when she gets quieter."

This time did not come soon, for even when her first excitement was over Mademoiselle's spirits continued to be very gay, and she talked without ceasing; she was unusually happy, she

presently told Susan, because Adolphe had that very day obtained another excellent engagement.

"Figure to yourself," she said, as she carefully took some fresh eggs out of her basket and laid them on a dish, "how rejoiced I am that his patience is at length rewarded. As I went out this morning I said to myself, 'Delphine, this occasion demands a little fête of some kind; it would be well to prepare an omelette au fines herbes for supper.' I therefore buy fresh eggs in addition to my usual outlay. I return, and behold! all good things arrive at once. You are here, petite, and have been so amiable for our cherished Gambetta. He, too, will join the fête this evening in his charming new toilette, for I have not forgotten to provide the morsel of liver he loves much."

Susan looked on and listened, and soon became very much interested in Mademoiselle's preparations. It appeared that as Adolphe was never home till late they were accustomed to have their principal meal together in the evening; to-day, however, in honour of her guest, she was bent on preparing a choice little mid-day repast. First she made some coffee and put the pot on the hearth to keep warm, and then, Susan having helped her to lay the table, she proceeded to make a sweet omelette. This process was most attractive. It was delightful to see how deftly she shook the handle of the little pan, how she coaxed and patted and tossed the eggs into the form of an omelette, and how, just at the very right moment, she hastily removed it into a hot dish, swiftly inserted the jam, and folded it over. It looked like magic to Susan, and for the moment it put everything about Sophia Jane out of her head. She soon thought of her again, however. Mademoiselle, having taken off a large white apron, sat down to do the honour of the table with a slightly increased colour but unsubdued powers of conversation, and her first remark was:

"So the poor little companion is ill. That is a great pity. You are quite alone, petite, are you not?"

Here was the very moment to correct the mistake, and Susan was just going to speak when Delphine added:

"Adolphe has informed me of the excellent progress she has lately made. It is a child of much ability he considers, and very amiable."

Alas for Susan! This remark checked the words on her lips, and brought back all her jealous feelings of Sophia Jane. She could not bear to hear her praised. She would put off saying anything

about the present just now, she thought. She would still do it of course; but it would be easier out of doors when she and Mademoiselle were walking home together. And it really seemed as though she were to have constant opportunities given to her; for, when they started an hour or so later, Mademoiselle remarked that the doll Grace wore her new bonnet, and asked:

"And does your little friend yet possess a doll with a head?"

What could be better? The answer in Susan's mind was, "she might have had one, but she bought the collar instead;" but somehow she could not get the words out. A strange voice seemed to reply for her:

"She doesn't care about dolls, now she's ill."

"Pauvre petite!" exclaimed Mademoiselle in a tone full of sympathy, then suddenly glancing across the road her face became alight with smiles, she waved her hand to someone, bowed repeatedly, and said in a low voice, "It is that brave Madame Jones!" Susan looked in the same direction; she had always been curious to see Madame Jones since the story of the beefsteak. There she was, standing at the door of her shop with her sleeves tucked up; joints of meat and carcasses hung all round. Her face was broad and red, and she wore a black net cap with pink roses in it. She might be brave, and noble, and all that Mademoiselle had said, but Susan thought her not at all nice-looking, and was quite disappointed. She had not expected her to be like that.

"It is a most excellent woman," murmured Delphine enthusiastically, "and of a noble heart. It is to her we owe the commencement of our success."

Aunt Hannah's gate was reached wonderfully soon after this, and still Susan had not told her of the mistake. "It was only put off, however," she said to herself, "and it really had not been her fault. She would explain all, the very next time they met."

Mademoiselle left her at the gate with an affectionate good-bye, and as Susan walked up the path to the door the doctor came out. He was generally in's great hurry, but to-day he stopped and smiled at her:

"Good news," he said. "If this improvement continues you may see your companion to-morrow, and sit with her an hour. She's much stronger and better."

Was it good news? Of course Susan was glad that Sophia was better, but the thought at once came into her mind, as she watched the doctor out of the gate, "she will ask me about the collar. She will expect a message from Mademoiselle." All that evening she was troubled about this, and even hoped that Sophia Jane might not be *quite* so well to-morrow, so that she might have time to see Mademoiselle again and make it all right. "What should I do if Sophia Jane asks me straight out whether I said the collar was from her? I couldn't tell her I didn't, and I couldn't tell her I did. Oh, how I wish I had not put it off." Now, in all her reflections, Susan still made excuses for herself, and still said, "it was not my fault." She did not see that she had been mean and jealous and deceitful; but she did see that she had got herself into a difficulty, and was anxious, not to atone for her fault, but to escape the consequences of it. When conscience told her that the right thing was confession to her companion, she would not listen. "After all," she said, "she perhaps won't ask me, and then it will be all right; for I *certainly will* explain it to Mademoiselle, as I always meant to." And in this way Susan got more and more enclosed in the tangled web she was weaving; for how can we make anything right unless we first see that it is wrong?

Sophia Jane continued better, and was much looking forward, Aunt Hannah said, to her companion's visit. Susan was cautioned before she went upstairs to be very kind and gentle, not to vex or thwart the invalid, and to call Buskin if anything should be wanted. Aunt Hannah would go out a little while, which she had scarcely done since Sophia Jane's illness. All this was promised, and it seemed another reason against saying anything about the collar; for, if Sophia Jane knew the truth, it would certainly vex and thwart her. Susan collected some things which she thought might amuse her, and perhaps prevent her from dwelling long on the dreaded subject. The game of dominoes, Grace, a box of beads, and Andersen's fairy tales. Struggling upstairs with these, she was soon in the invalid's room.

Sophia Jane looked much more like herself than when Susan had last seen her. She was lying quietly down among her pillows with a very white little face, and one hand resting feebly on the substantial form of Dinah, Margareta's black doll. By her side was a tiny bunch of snowdrops which Nanna had found in the garden that morning; how kind everyone was to her now! It gave Susan a little pang to remember that she herself had done nothing to please her, but just the opposite. Often, when Sophia Jane was well, she had asked to be allowed to have Dinah to

herself for a little while, but had always been refused. Now, here she was. She was a most attractive doll, for there was a foreign air about her that distinguished her from all English ones. The nuns at Bahia had stuffed her so cleverly that her plump black face and limbs glistened; she wore earrings, a gay turban, and very full flowered chintz skirts. All her undergarments would "take off," and were trimmed with curious hand-made lace. It was a great privilege to be allowed to play with her.

Sophia Jane received her visitor quietly, with a small pinched smile. In answer to Susan's inquiries she pronounced herself better, but added with her usual old-fashioned air:

"I'm not well yet, though. I'm still ill and shaky."

"What would you like to play at?" was Susan's next inquiry put rather hastily.

"Nothing at all," was the decided answer. "I want to talk."

"But," said Susan earnestly, "aunt told me you were not to talk much—she did, really."

"Well, I'll ask questions, and you talk," said Sophia Jane.

"Wouldn't you rather have a game of dominoes?" Susan ventured to suggest.

"No," answered Sophia Jane snappishly, "I wouldn't." Such an angry gleam came into her eyes that Susan, remembering she was not to vex or thwart her, resigned herself to be questioned. Her heart beat quickly. What would the first question be? It was quite an easy one.

"Did she like it?" asked Sophia Jane, settling herself comfortably on her elbow, and staring at her companion.

"Very much indeed," answered Susan.

"Did it fit him? Tell me all about it."

"Beautifully. I put it on myself, and he looked very nice in it. I had dinner with Mademoiselle, and she made an omelette—and coffee—and I helped to lay the table—and to wash the things afterwards—and she told me Monsieur has got some more lessons. Then she brought me home, and on the way we saw Mrs Jones standing in the door of the shop. She's not a nice-

looking woman, but Mademoiselle says she has a noble heart. I should think it must be horrid to be a butcher's wife. Shouldn't you?"

Pausing for a reply, Susan gave a nervous glance at her companion, whose eyes were still fixed upon her, and who took no notice whatever of the question.

"Did Mademoiselle send a message to me about the collar?" she asked.

"No, she didn't," said Susan. Then, seeing how crest-fallen the poor little face looked, she added hastily:

"I expect she means to come and thank you herself, or perhaps to write you a letter."

A small tear had gathered in each of Sophia Jane's eyes, but she winked them quickly away.

"You're *sure*," she said in a troubled voice, "that she understood it was from me?"

The moment had come. Susan looked straight back in her friend's face and answered instantly:

"Yes; I am quite sure."

It was over. She had now told a real story—a very bad one. Nothing worse could happen.

Sophia Jane seemed satisfied, She gave a little sigh, and said softly:

"Thank you. Then I expect she'll write."

After this she did not mention the collar again, but was willing to play at dominoes, though she could not get through more than one game.

"I'm tired now," she said. "You may read aloud." When, however, she found that Susan had only brought a book of fairy tales, she was much displeased, and declared fretfully that fairy tales were nonsense. "They're wicked too," she added, "because they tell stories."

Susan disputed this, whereupon Sophia Jane grew so excited and angry, and spoke in such a shrill voice that Buskin came in from the next room to see what was the matter.

"You've been here long enough, Miss Susan," she said, glancing at Sophia Jane's flushed cheeks. "You better go down-stairs and let Miss Sophia Jane be quiet. It's time she took her medicine."

Susan collected her property and went away. There were a good many things to carry, but she took one with her which weighed more heavily than all the rest put together—the knowledge that she had told a story.

And now, at last, her eyes were opened wide, and she could see clearly the tangled web she had been weaving for some time past. She could see that she had first despised Sophia Jane, and then been jealous of her; first been conceited and proud, and then mean and deceitful. Good Susan no longer, but far far worse than her poor little friend, whom she had always considered so naughty. Little by little the web had become more and more twisted and confused. Would it ever be straight again? She made no excuse for herself now. Her heart was so full of sorrow and repentance that she hardly knew how to bear it, and, creeping sorrowfully up into the attic, she cast herself down on the big black box and cried. She had thought herself so good since she had come to Ramsgate, they had all told her so, and yet how naughty she had been—naughtier and naughtier, until at last she had told a story. What should she do? An old rhyme of Maria's came into her head as she lay there sobbing:

"A fault confessed
Is half redressed."

That was what she must do. Confess it all to Sophia Jane. But what a humbling, miserable thing! She could see the expression on Sophia Jane's face when she heard that Susan—good Susan—who had always been held up as an example, had deceived Mademoiselle and told a story. "Oh, I *couldn't*!" said Susan to herself. "Anything else—any other punishment I would bear, but *not* that." And then she went on to remember Monsieur and Mademoiselle would know too, and they would never like her again, or think her a good little girl—it would be too dreadful. "I shall never never be happy again any way," said Susan half aloud. "If I don't tell I shall be miserable, and if I do tell I shall be miserable too."

Nanna's voice calling her down to tea put an end for the moment to these thoughts; but they came back during the evening with yet greater force, and when she went to bed she felt unhappier than she had ever been in her life. She was still, however, undecided about confessing her fault.

During the next few days she did not see Sophia Jane, though the improvement continued. It was a relief not to see her; and yet to go about with a feeling like a lump of lead in her bosom was not, Susan found, a comfortable thing. It did not get lighter as each day passed, and at last something happened which so increased its weight that she thought any punishment—any open disgrace—would be easier to bear. For, how it happened no one could tell, Sophia Jane managed to catch a chill, the fever returned with renewed violence, and she became seriously ill again. Susan could soon tell from the grave face of the doctor, and from the scraps of conversation she overheard, that her poor little companion was even worse than she had been. Besides this, Mr Bevis came one evening, and after he had talked a little while to Aunt Hannah her eyes filled with tears, and Susan heard her say:

"The child's life hangs on a thread."

Mr Bevis said some texts and soon went away, but that one sentence remained in Susan's mind and made her more miserable than ever. A thread! It was such a thin, weak thing to hang on, and if it snapped where would Sophia Jane's life be? Perhaps it would break soon, that very night, before she could see her again and ask her pardon. It was such a dreadful thought that Susan was unable to keep it to herself any longer. She shut her eyes, said her evening prayer all through, and at the end added very earnestly: "Don't let it break. *Please* don't let it break."

Then Margaretta came rushing into the sitting-room where Susan was curled up in the window seat. She looked pale and frightened.

"Where's Aunt Hannah?" she said.

"Just gone out of the room," answered Susan.

"Oh!" she added, "*do* tell me—is Sophia Jane worse?"

"I don't know," said Margaretta hurriedly. "I want aunt. She ought to see her; I think perhaps she would send for Dr Martin again."

Dr Martin was sent for, and came, but he did not give much comfort.

"You can't do anything," he said, "but try and keep up her strength. A great deal will depend on the next few hours."

From her lonely corner Susan watched and waited all that wretched evening, and, not daring to ask questions, stayed there, chill with misery, until long past her usual bed-time. At last Buskin came to find her. Wonder of wonders! there were tears in Buskin's eyes, and Susan was encouraged by this display of softness to stretch out her arms to her for comfort, and whisper, "Will she get better?"

"The Lord only knows, my dear," answered Buskin gruffly; "we're all in His hands."

Chapter Six.

Sophia Jane posts a Letter, and Susan pays a Visit.

Susan remained awake a long, long time that night listening with strained ears to the subdued noises in the house. She heard Dr Martin come and go away again, his boots creaking softly on each stair; she heard Aunt Hannah's voice, mysterious and low, wishing him good-night, and after that the shutting of the door. Then a great stillness seemed to fall over everything, and she went to sleep at last.

When she next opened her eyes the darkness was over—here was bright daylight again, and Buskin drawing up her blind. The first words she heard were like part of a dream:

"She's had a beautiful sleep, and the fever's taken a turn."

Susan rubbed her eyes to be quite sure she was awake, and that the good news was true.

"The doctor's been already this morning," continued Buskin, coming up to the bedside, "and he says she'll do now with care."

Susan had a hundred questions to ask, and her joy and relief were so great that she wanted to pour it all out at once. But this morning Buskin was "herself again," her soft expression was

gone; she was cold and stiff as usual, and would scarcely say more than "yes" and "no" to these eager inquiries. "I shall hear all about it," said Susan to herself, "at breakfast-time;" and she dressed as quickly as she could and went down-stairs.

She was right, for no one mentioned any other subject throughout the meal. Sophia Jane had been neither liked or valued while she was strong and well, but her illness seemed to have drawn all hearts towards her. And yet she was the same Sophia Jane!

"I never could have believed," said Aunt Hannah with tears in her eyes, as she put down her tea-cup, "that I should have grown so fond of that child!"

"Poor little darling!" said Nanna.

"I cried my eyes out last night," added Margaretta, "after Dr Martin had gone."

"The relief of seeing her fall asleep!" continued Aunt Hannah. "I shall never forget it! It was just two o'clock, and I had sent Buskin to bed. Presently, I thought the child was lying more quietly, and her breathing sounded different. I hardly dared to look at her, but when I did she was sleeping as calmly as a baby, and her forehead quite moist. I shall never forget it!"

"Dear little thing!" repeated Nanna.

"We shall all be very thankful, I'm sure," said Aunt Hannah looking round the table, "if Sophia Jane gets quite well again."

"Of course we shall!" exclaimed everyone together.

"And during her illness I have felt that when she was well we were all sometimes too hard upon her faults."

There was silence.

"Everyone is better for being loved," pursued Aunt Hannah. "And I fancy no one has ever loved Sophia Jane much in her life. Perhaps this has made her hard and disagreeable. At any rate, I think we might all with advantage be more patient and kind than we have been."

It seemed difficult to Aunt Hannah to get through this speech, for she stopped very often; and Susan could see that once she was nearly crying. She had been sitting up half the night and

was no doubt very tired, but how wonderful it was to hear her speak like that of Sophia Jane! It made her resolve still more firmly than she had yet done, that as soon as ever her companion was well enough she would make full and free confession of her fault.

And this time Sophia Jane seemed to have made up her mind to go straight on and get well, for she improved every day; and though it was only a little way at a time there were no drawbacks. The morning arrived which Susan had long been waiting for, when Aunt Hannah said, "You may see Sophia Jane." Susan thought that Mary Queen of Scots could not have felt worse when they told her that the block was ready; but she did not flinch. The moment she was alone with Sophia Jane she faltered out her story, and stood before her with burning cheeks and downcast eyes. The little invalid peered curiously out of the frilled white cap she wore. It was one of Aunt Hannah's adapted to her size, because she complained that her head felt cold, and it gave her such a strangely old witch-like air that it greatly increased Susan's fear and distress.

"But I thought you said Mademoiselle understood I sent it?"

"So I did," murmured Susan.

"But that was a story?"

No answer.

"But I thought you were always good?" with a gleam of gratification in her eyes.

"I'm very sorry," said the culprit.

Sophia Jane paused a moment, then she asked:

"Does Mademoiselle know now?"

"No," said Susan. "I haven't seen her."

"Well!" exclaimed Sophia Jane scornfully, "I should think you might write."

"So I will," said Susan earnestly; "and then will you forgive me?"

"Oh, I don't know about that!" said Sophia Jane, shaking her head till the frill of her cap trembled. "You see it was so very bad of you."

"I know," said Susan humbly. Then venturing to glance at Sophia Jane's face she was surprised to see a sudden little smile appear, and to hear her exclaim:

"At any rate there's *one* thing! They'll never be able to say again, 'try to be as good as Susan,' because you've been much naughtier now than I've ever been!"

She chuckled softly to herself, and then said—suddenly and sharply:

"Why don't you write the letter?"

It was not the least part of Susan's punishment to be treated as a child who could not be trusted. But she bore it patiently, fetched her desk, and wrote the words sternly dictated by Sophia Jane. The latter then requested that she might read the letter, and having done so watched while Susan directed the envelope and put a stamp on it. Then she said:

"Give it me," and immediately pushed it under her pillow.

"Sha'n't I post it?" asked Susan humbly.

"Certainly not!" said Sophia Jane decidedly. "That would be a pretty thing indeed!"

Susan felt humbled to the dust, and yet when she left her companion's room her heart was lighter, and she was really happier than she had been for a long time. She had done what she could to repair her fault, and all the pricks and stabs which Sophia Jane thrust into her were not nearly so hard to bear as the reproaches of her own self. True they were painful, for Susan was a proud child and liked to be well thought of; but after all she was suffering justly. Even if Monsieur and Mademoiselle should always despise her after reading that letter she should deserve it. But, oh, what a pity it was! So the thing next to be dreaded was the meeting with Mademoiselle Delphine, and to see her kindly brown face look cold and displeased. Susan could not help hoping that it would not happen just yet. She did not want to see either her or Monsieur for a long time. She wondered whether Sophia Jane had sent the letter at once, and whether Mademoiselle would write in answer or come herself. She was not, however, kept long in

uncertainty about this, for two days after her interview with Sophia Jane there came a note for Aunt Hannah, which she opened at breakfast, saying:

"This is from Mademoiselle Delphine."

Susan watched her face anxiously, and saw a puzzled expression as she read on.

"She wants to know," said Aunt Hannah, at last looking up, "if she may come and see Sophia Jane this evening at five o'clock, and says she brings a friend. What friend can she mean?"

"Very strange, indeed!" said Margaretta. "I've no objection whatever to Mademoiselle's seeing the child," continued Aunt Hannah. "In fact, I think it would interest and amuse her to have a visitor. But the friend! I must say I consider that rather thoughtless and ill-judged. I am always glad to see Monsieur La Roche or his sister—but their *friends*! That is quite another matter."

"Quite," said Nanna and Margaretta both at once.

Susan was at first too occupied with the idea that Mademoiselle was coming that very evening to think about the friend at all, or to wonder whom it could be; she hastened with the news to Sophia Jane, who had now so far improved in strength that she was allowed to sit up a little while every afternoon. She was delighted at the idea of the visit, and at once made a suggestion about the friend which filled Susan with dismay, it was this:

"Perhaps, as she's so fond of Mrs Jones, she means to bring her."

What an idea! and yet when Susan thought it over it did not seem unlikely, for Mademoiselle always spoke with great admiration of "Madame Jones" as an acquaintance to be much valued. "A noble-hearted being," she had called her more than once. Susan wondered what Margaretta and Nanna would think of her if she came. They always talked so much about appearance, and manner, and dress, and if they disapproved of it they said, "rather common." They would certainly call Madame Jones "rather common," for they would not understand about her noble heart; and indeed Susan remembered she should not have done so herself without Mademoiselle's explanation. It was a pity that when people had noble hearts it did not make them look noble outside, and she ended by hoping very much that Madame Jones would not come.

It was between four and five o'clock in the afternoon of the expected visit, and the little girls were alone together. Aunt Hannah had promised that Mademoiselle should have a snug tea with them upstairs if she came alone, so that they were awaiting her arrival with some anxiety. Susan could not help a little secret hope now that she would *not* be alone, so that the dreaded meeting might be deferred. Sophia Jane had made no further reference to the collar, but Susan felt as much abashed in her presence as any prisoner before his judge, and sometimes found it difficult to talk. She gave a timid look at her; she was in a large arm-chair close to the fire, very much covered up and surrounded by pillows, in the midst of which she looked like a small white mouse in a red-flannel gown. Her features were sharpened by illness, and she still insisted on wearing Aunt Hannah's cap; but though all this made her more like an old woman than a child, there was to-day a softened light in her blue eyes which Susan noticed at once. She had never seen it there before. She took courage.

"Do you suppose," she said, glancing at black Dinah, "that Margaretta will let you play with Dinah when you are well?"

"I don't want to get well," said Sophia Jane at once.

"Don't—want—to get—well!" repeated Susan in surprise.

"I shouldn't mind always being ill," said Sophia Jane. "Everyone's kind, no one scolds you; you have nice things to eat, and lemonade. I don't want to get well."

"I want you to get well to play with me again," said Susan. "And I know everybody wants you to get well."

"Why do they?" asked the invalid.

"Oh, because—of course they do," was the only reason Susan could give.

"Well," said Sophia Jane thoughtfully, "of course there's the trouble of it, and the doctor to pay."

She wrinkled her brow as she said this, and looked sideways at Susan with her old cunning expression.

"Oh, it isn't that," said Susan very earnestly; "why, they're all dreadfully sorry. That night you were worst, you know, Aunt Hannah cried, and every one, and so did Buskin."

"I don't think I should cry if they were ill," said Sophia Jane after some reflection.

"Well, it shows how fond they are of you, doesn't it?" remarked Susan.

"Perhaps," replied Sophia Jane, and after that she was silent for a long time, and Susan stationed herself at the window to watch for Mademoiselle and her friend.

Whenever she saw two people in the distance she cried out, "Here they are!" And this happened so often, and turned out to be not the least like them, that at last it made the invalid quite peevish. So many false alarms, when she could not look out of the window herself, were most distracting.

"You're not to say it again," she exclaimed in a weak voice of command, "unless you see them *acshally* coming in at the gate."

Susan controlled herself with difficulty, for she was getting very much excited as the time drew near. And now, stepping quickly and neatly along with a large basket on her arm, Mademoiselle's figure did really appear—alone. Where was the friend? Susan's heart sank, and her hands grew quite cold. In another minute she must meet Mademoiselle, and then— "She's coming in at the gate," she announced to the invalid in a trembling voice; "and she hasn't brought Mrs Jones or anyone, but only a large basket."

"You're sure?" said Sophia Jane in a husky agitated tone; "then look here, quick, before she comes in."

Susan turned sharply round from the window. Sophia Jane was leaning forward over the grate, with a flush on her white cheeks and her eyes very bright, and in her hand she held, soiled and crumpled, Susan's letter of confession. The next second it had dropped into the heart of the fire, and as the door opened to admit Mademoiselle a little flame sprang brightly up. And that was how Sophia Jane posted the letter. It was such a sudden thing, and so completely altered the state of affairs that Susan could not at first take it in, or remember that she might now answer Mademoiselle's greetings without shame. These were most affectionate and cheerful, and she presently seated herself close to Sophia Jane's arm-chair with her basket on her knees, and untied her bonnet-strings.

"Madame, your aunt, is so kind to ask me to take tea with you," she said, "and I have taken the liberty to bring also a Monsieur who is anxious to make his compliments to Miss Sophia."

"Is he down-stairs?" asked Sophia Jane.

"Mais non," said Mademoiselle with a little burst of laughter; "he is here, in this room, and waits to make himself known."

She opened the lid of the basket a very little way and peeped in.

"It's Gambetta!" exclaimed Sophia Jane, in a voice hoarse with excitement; "that's what you meant by a friend."

There was the tiny tinkle of a bell. Mademoiselle opened the basket wide, and there indeed was Gambetta in all the dignity of the new collar.

Nothing could exceed Sophia Jane's delight as she clasped her hands in an ecstasy and laughed aloud. "Doesn't he look nice in it?" she said. Mademoiselle smiled and nodded in return; everyone looked pleased except Gambetta himself, who held his neck stiffly as though he said, "Pride must suffer pain."

Susan stood a little behind the group while this was going on; now she came in front of Mademoiselle and caressed Gambetta's soft furry neck.

"It's Sophia Jane's present," she said, "not mine. She sent it to Monsieur for him."

Mademoiselle looked puzzled.

"It was got with Susan's half-crown," added Sophia Jane quickly, "so it's from both of us."

"Ah, that is very amiable of you both," said Mademoiselle. "Gambetta has both the two of you to thank—and Adolphe also; that is very agreeable."

And so the event which Susan had thought of and dreaded so much passed with this slight remark. The confession had been made, and her mind was clear again, and free. Free to laugh, and talk, and look people straight in the face, and be her old happy self. But there was one thing she never forgot, and that was Sophia Jane's generosity. By burning that letter she had

gained not only Susan's affection but her respect; she should never look down upon her again.

Meanwhile Gambetta became restive, and, in spite of all his mistress's entreaties, broke away from her, and refused to settle down till he had made a thorough examination of the room. He jumped on to the table, smelt all the chairs, looked suspiciously behind the chest of drawers, and walked gingerly in his high furry boots amongst Sophia Jane's medicine bottles. His every movement was watched and admired, and by the time Buskin brought in tea he had finished his inquiries and drawn near the group by the fire. Then, after one thoughtful glance round, he chose Sophia Jane's position as being the warmest, softly leapt on to her lap, and snuggled himself among her shawls. In this situation he presently began a purring song of comfort, in which he was joined by the tea-kettle. Sophia Jane's satisfaction was now complete. Mademoiselle Delphine's face beamed, and Susan, pouring out tea with Aunt Hannah's best pink set, felt almost too happy for words. Probably few rooms held four happier creatures that evening.

It was pleasant to see how Mademoiselle enjoyed herself; how she said, "Excellente!" to the tea, and water-cresses, and muffins, and how she coaxed Sophia Jane to eat, and made her laugh. She was one of those fortunate people who pick up pleasures everywhere, and find amusement in the most common things of life. After tea she told them stories. Interesting details about Paris, and Adolphe, and their journey to England with poor Gambetta in a basket, and all this made the time pass so quickly, that when the clock struck seven everyone was startled. Mademoiselle herself sprang up at once with a little shriek. She had promised to meet Adolphe at a certain point on her way home, and he would without doubt be waiting for her. Gambetta, therefore, was hustled into his basket before he had time to resist, and Mademoiselle, having embraced her little friends heartily, was soon on her way.

The two little girls were silent for a minute after she had gone. Sophia Jane, languid after such unusual excitement, stared absently at the fire, and Susan, not yet quite at her ease, did not like to speak first. But when Buskin entered it seemed to give her courage, and she said:

"Haven't we had a nice tea-party?"

"Yes," answered Sophia Jane; and added thoughtfully, "it's very nice to be ill."

"But I want you to get well," said Susan. "You can't think how dull it is down-stairs without you."

Buskin would not allow any further conversation, and Susan had to say good-night and go away. As she kissed her friend's tiny befrilled face, she felt for the first time really fond of her, and grateful also. She had made the discovery lately that you could not judge people by their outsides, or even by what others said of them. Under her cross, crabbed manner Sophia Jane had hidden a grateful heart, which had answered to the first touch of kindness; and disguised by sharp and shrewish words, she had shown a really generous and forgiving spirit. Like Madame Jones, it appeared that she had a noble heart.

The next day was one of some excitement to Susan, for it had been arranged that she was to spend it with some friends of Margaretta and Nanna who lived at Ramsgate. Their name was Winslow. It was not altogether a pleasant prospect, for she had never been there before, and she had very little hope that she should find them agreeable. Not that she knew anything against them; on the contrary, their name was never uttered without words of admiration, and if Nanna or Margaretta wished to bestow high approval on anything, they always said it was like something the Winslows had. It appeared, indeed, that these friends were much favoured by fortune. Their house was the pleasantest, their horses the best, their taste the most excellent, their children the prettiest and most clever. It was this last point which had specially interested Sophia Jane and Susan, and they had gradually come to dislike the little Winslows, though they knew nothing of them but their names and appearance. Whenever Nanna or Margaretta returned from seeing these friends they were brimful of admiration at the excellent conduct and talent of the children, and did not fail to draw unfavourable contrasts. They described their dresses, repeated their speeches, and gave many instances of their polite behaviour and obedience to rules. Little Eva, who was not so old as Susan, could already play "The Harmonious Blacksmith" without a mistake. Dear Julia, who was Sophia Jane's exact age, danced the minuet with the utmost elegance, and always held herself upright. As for darling Lucy, she spoke French with ease, and had begged to be allowed to begin German.

Although they had never spoken to these wonderful children, the little girls had often met them out of doors walking with their governess, and had long ago made up their minds about them.

They thought them prim and dull-looking, and found something annoying in their neatly-dressed little figures, and the perfect propriety with which they stepped along, holding their small round heads rather high. They imagined, too, that they had seen them cast glances of surprise and disdain on Sophia Jane's clothes, which were often shabby, and never becoming. They agreed, therefore, in considering them disagreeable children, and were by no means anxious for their acquaintance.

Remembering all this, Susan felt there was no chance at all that she should enjoy herself, and she did not get much comfort from Sophia Jane, when she went to say good-bye.

"I'm glad I'm not going," she said. "I know I should hate 'em. You know we always have."

"Perhaps they'll be nicer in-doors," said Susan, though she did not think it probable.

"I believe they're all horrid, every one of 'em," said Sophia Jane decidedly, "in-doors and out, and I'm glad I'm not going."

"It wouldn't be quite so bad if you were," said Susan with a sigh, "because we could talk about it afterwards. But I must go; there's Margaretta calling me."

"I hope, Susan," said Margaretta, as they walked along the parade together, "that you will remember to behave very nicely, and answer properly when Mrs Winslow speaks to you. Don't blush and look shy. The little Winslows never look silly, and I have never seen them blush."

"Are you fond of Mrs Winslow?" asked Susan. "She's very kind," answered Margaretta, "and very clever. She knows a great deal about education."

Susan asked no more questions, and in a quarter of an hour they arrived at the house which was large and tall, with green balconies, and a great many windows. Part of it faced the sea, and part of it went round the corner into a street, and it all looked, inside and out, so bright and clean and new that it was quite dazzling. Susan thought she had never seen a house where everything shone so much, and there was so much light. Not a shadow, not a dark corner anywhere, and all the furniture was polished so highly that she saw herself and Margaretta reflected a dozen times as they moved along. When they reached the drawing-room it was still more confusing, for there were so many mirrors, and windows, and statuettes under glass

cases, that the brilliancy almost brought tears to her eyes, it was such a contrast to the dimness of Aunt Hannah's low ceilings and small rooms. Wherever she turned her head, too, another Susan stared at her, and this made her feel shy and uncomfortable.

"Isn't it a beautiful room?" said Margaretta, seating herself on a pompous yellow sofa. "So cheerful!"

Before Susan could answer, Mrs Winslow came in. She was a fair lady with a very straight nose, and she welcomed them kindly, and asked after Sophia Jane.

"My little people," she continued, scarcely waiting, Susan noticed, for Margaretta's answer, "are just returning from their walk. Air and light are as necessary to the young as to flowers, are they not? How can we expect their minds to expand unless the body is healthy?"

"No, indeed," said Margaretta.

Mrs Winslow then proposed that they should go and take off their hats, which being done she led the way down-stairs into the dining-room, where the "little people" were already assembled with their governess for their early dinner. During this Susan had plenty of time for observation, and she soon decided that she should have to tell Sophia Jane that they were *not* nicer in-doors than out. They were wonderfully alike: all had little straight noses, fair complexions, and pale blue eyes, and when they spoke they said all their words very distinctly, and never cut any of them short. They were very polite to Susan.

"I encourage conversation with my children during meal-time, on principle," said Mrs Winslow. "How can you expect them to acquire right habits of speaking if silence is imposed?"

"No, indeed," said Margaretta again.

"The force of habit," continued Mrs Winslow, putting down her knife and fork, and looking from Margaretta to Miss Pink, the governess, "has never, it seems to me, been sufficiently considered in education. It is a giant power. It rests with us to turn it this way or that, to give it a right or a wrong direction, to use it for good or for evil. I say to my children, for instance, 'always think before you act, in the smallest as well as the greatest things.' By degrees I thus form in them habits of steadiness, thoughtfulness, calmness, which will not desert them when called upon to act in moments of danger and

difficulty. 'Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it'—nay more, he *cannot* depart from it."

It was quite by chance as Mrs Winslow said these last words that her eyes rested on Susan, who had been staring at her all the while she had been speaking, and who now felt that an answer of some kind was expected. She had none to give, however, for she had not been listening at all to what had been said, her mind being filled with wonder and awe at Mrs Winslow, who talked as though she were reading aloud. She only blushed, therefore, and immediately became aware that three pairs of pale blue eyes were fastened upon her from the other side of the table. The little Winslows never blushed, Margaretta had said, and of course they thought her very silly. She longed for the meal to be over, and the visit also. Why, she wondered, were Margaretta and Nanna so fond of coming here? Margaretta did not look as if she were enjoying herself much. She was sitting in a stiff position, with her head a little on one side, watching every glance of Mrs Winslow's, so that she might say, "yes, indeed," or "quite so," or "exactly," in the right place. Her voice did not sound like the voice she had at Aunt Hannah's, but smaller, and she said her words mincingly. Susan felt sure she was not enjoying herself. Why *did* she come?

Presently the conversation became more interesting, and Susan now listened to it with some anxiety, for Mrs Winslow was making arrangements for the afternoon, and she hoped to hear of an early return to Belmont Cottage. She did not want to see any more of the little Winslows, and quite longed to get back to Sophia Jane and tell her all about them. It was disappointing, therefore, to hear it decided that Margaretta should drive out with Mrs Winslow, who would leave her at Aunt Hannah's, and that Susan should walk back later with Miss Pink and the little people. Margaretta was almost to be envied. Perhaps it was because she liked driving in a carriage with a pair of swift horses that she liked coming here. And yet Mrs Winslow's presence would spoil anything, Susan thought. If she went on talking like that, and Margaretta had to sit up and listen to her and make little remarks, the drive would not be worth having; it could not be much worse to walk home with the little Winslows.

After dinner the little girls took their visitor into the schoolroom, where they were to amuse themselves until it was time to start for their walk. It was a large bright room like all the others in the house; but this cheerfulness did not seem to have affected the Winslows themselves. They were quiet children, always

good and obedient, but rather dull. They did not seem to understand games, and seldom laughed. How very different they were to Sophia Jane! Certainly she was not nearly so well behaved, but then she was a far more amusing companion. The afternoon seemed endless.

"Don't you ever play with dolls?" Susan asked at last.

"No," answered Lucy the eldest, "we are too old. Eva has one, but we put away our dolls on my last birthday."

"What *do* you play at?" inquired Susan.

"We haven't much time to play," replied Lucy seriously, "because we belong to so many things."

"What things?"

"There's the 'Early Rising Society,' and the 'Half-hour Needlework for the East-End Society,' and the 'Reading Society,' and the 'Zenana Meetings;' and we're all 'Young Abstainers.'"

"What's that?" asked Susan.

"It's the children's temperance society. We pledge ourselves not to take alcohol, and to prevent others from taking it if we can. There's a meeting once a month. It's our turn next time to have it here."

"What do you do when you meet?" inquired Susan.

"Some of us work," said Lucy, "and someone reads aloud."

"And then," added little Eva, "we have tea."

There was a faint look of satisfaction on Eva's face as she said this.

"Eva thinks tea is the best part of all," said Julia, the next sister, rather scornfully.

"Well," said Susan, "I expect I should too, because I'm not fond of needlework. Unless," she added, "the book was very interesting to listen to."

"Sometimes it is," said Julia, "and sometimes it isn't. Are you fond of reading?"

"Some books," answered Susan.

"If you belonged to the Reading Society," put in Lucy, "you'd have to read an improving book for half an hour every day, and perhaps at the end of the year you'd get a prize."

"I suppose you mean an uninteresting book like a lesson book," said Susan. "I shouldn't like that."

"Well, of course, it mustn't be a *story-book*," said Julia.

"Would the *Pilgrim's Progress* do?" asked Susan.

The little girls looked doubtfully at each other. "I'm not sure," said Lucy, "whether that that *would* be considered an improving book."

Susan proceeded to make more inquiries about the various societies, but she did not think any of them sounded attractive, and certainly had no wish to join the little Winslows in belonging to them. This filled up the time until four o'clock, when, with Miss Pink, they all set out on their walk to Belmont Cottage. Susan was surprised to see that each little girl was provided with a hoop, which was the nearest approach to a toy of any kind that she had observed during her visit.

"We always take hoops out in the afternoon until the month of May," explained Lucy. "Mother considers the exercise healthy."

It was such a relief to Susan to feel that the visit was over, and that she was really going back, that she could not walk quite soberly with Miss Pink, but danced along the parade by little Eva's side as she bowled her hoop, and was almost inclined to sing aloud with pleasure. There were a great many people about, and quite a crowd of carriages, and soon in the distance they saw Mrs Winslow's black horses approaching. She had left Margaretta at Belmont Cottage, and was now returning. Just as the carriage passed, Eva, who was staring at her mother, gave her hoop a blow which sent it in the wrong direction, and it trundled out into the middle of the road, almost under the horses' feet. Not quite, however, for Susan, who was watching it, sprang after it and caught it away just in time. Mrs Winslow nodded and smiled at the children, the carriage drove on, and Susan carried the hoop back to the path where the little Winslows were drawn up in a row with very serious faces.

"You might have been run over," said Lucy gravely.

"I didn't think about it," said Susan.

"Mother says," continued Lucy, "Always think before you act."

"My dear," interrupted Miss Pink hastily, "Susan has done very well. There are exceptions to every rule."

When Susan reached home she found Sophia Jane still sitting up, and eager to hear all the news about the visit. She at once inquired if the Winslows were "horrid;" but Susan would not quite say that. "They were very kind to her and very good, but—" she added, "I haven't enjoyed myself a bit, and I never want to go there again or see them any more."

"I told you so," said Sophia Jane, and she gave herself a hug of satisfaction.

Chapter Seven.

"Captain Enticknapp."

It was the end of March before Sophia Jane was allowed to go down-stairs. She had been ill six long weeks, and even now she was very far from strong, and walked in a tottering manner like a little old lady. Susan, much excited and pleased, hovered round her, anxious to be useful and add to her comfort. She led her carefully to the large arm-chair which she had dragged near the window, put a cushion at her back and a footstool under her feet, and brought her a cup of beef-tea. Sophia Jane looked out of the window and clapped her hands with pleasure.

"How beautiful it is!" she exclaimed.

For the sun was shining very brightly, and all the crocuses in Aunt Hannah's garden were in bloom—smart little soldiers in their trim uniforms of purple, gold, and white, standing in rows amongst their bristling green spears. There were tiny green leaves on all the gooseberry bushes, the sky was blue, and it all looked like a fresh new world to her after she had been shut up so long in one room.

"I may go out of doors to-morrow, mayn't I?" she asked eagerly as Aunt Hannah came into the room. But Aunt shook her head.

"You must be patient, my dear," she said. "The sun is hot, but the wind is in the east, and it is not really warm yet. The doctor says we must be careful not to risk a chill. Susan must think of something to amuse you in-doors."

"I know something she would like," said Susan. She nodded her head towards the portrait over the mantelpiece, and the gentleman in the pig-tail seemed to answer her glance with his kind blue eyes.

"You promised long ago you would tell us a story about him—a true one. We should both like that."

"Perhaps I will this evening," replied Aunt Hannah; "but you must amuse Sophia Jane quietly until then, and be careful not to tire her."

This Susan readily promised, and looked forward with great pleasure to the evening, not only because she was extremely fond of hearing a story, but because she had gradually come to take a good deal of interest in Captain Enticknapp. He was her mother's aunt's father, and therefore Susan's great-grandfather, and it was wonderful to think how long ago he lived, and what strange things he must have seen and done. The sitting-room, and indeed the whole house, was full of objects he had brought home from his different voyages: oddly shaped-cups and bowls and dishes of blue china, ivory carvings, and curious inlaid snuff-boxes. There was one idol Susan specially liked. He was made of sandalwood, and sat cross-legged in the middle of the mantelpiece just under the portrait. His forehead was high and shining, and his expression benevolent; here and there, he had been chipped and notched, so that one might smell the fragrance of the wood. In her own mind Susan had given him the name of Robin Grey, which she thought seemed to suit his face. He was the nicest of all the idols, and there were a great many of all kinds.

Captain Enticknapp's blue eyes looked quietly down from the picture upon all these things, and also upon sundry of his personal possessions which had gone on many and many a voyage with him, and seen rough weather in his company. There stood the square camphor-wood chest which had fitted into his cabin, and since its last journey had remained here in the calm retreat of Aunt Hannah's sitting-room. There was his great watch, double cased, with a hole through it; made, Susan had heard, by a bullet which might have killed Captain Enticknapp if it had not struck against the watch first. There, too, was the snuff-box he had always carried. It was a flat silver

one, with portraits of Queen Anne and Dr Sacheverel engraved upon it; but they were so faint now with age, and the constant pressure of the captain's thumb that they could hardly be traced.

These things served to keep her great-grandfather and his voyages and adventures constantly before Susan's mind, and she thought of him very often. At night, when the wind was high, and she heard the great waves tossing and tumbling on the shore, she liked to fancy him far out at sea in his ship, and to wonder if he ever felt afraid. When Aunt Hannah read prayers she came to a verse in the Psalms sometimes, which seemed quite to belong to him:

"Such as go down to the sea in ships, and occupy their business in great waters; these men see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep."

That was just what Captain Enticknapp had done, and Susan had now made up so many stories about him in her head, that she was very glad to think she was really to hear a true one at last.

Aunt Hannah did not forget her promise, and that evening, Margaretta and Nanna being away, and the children comfortably settled near the fire, she took up her knitting and began as follows:

"You both know that the old watch I have shown you sometimes, with holes through the case, belonged to my father, Captain John Enticknapp. I am going to tell you the story of how those holes were made, and how that watch and the gratitude of a man were once the means of saving his life. It happened long ago, when I was a little girl of Susan's age, and lived with my father and mother in a house on the river at Wapping."

The children gazed at Aunt Hannah. She wore a front and a cap; her face was wrinkled. What did she look like when she was a little girl of Susan's age?

"You know, Susan," continued she, looking up at the portrait, "that Captain Enticknapp was your great-grandfather, and I daresay it seems impossible to you to think of him as young as as he was when that picture was painted."

"Was he young?" asked Sophia Jane. "Then, why has he got grey hair?"

"That is not grey hair, my dear, it is powder; nearly every one who could afford to pay the tax wore powder in those days. When that picture was done my father was only thirty-five years old. Well, as I told you, we lived at Wapping, on the banks of the river Thames, close to the great London Docks. Since then other docks have been built, and Wapping is no longer such an important place; but then it was the chief entrance for shipping, and nearly all the great merchantmen came in there with their cargoes, or started thence for foreign countries. Many large vessels lay there for months at a time to be refitted, and as our house stood close to the water's-edge you could see from its windows all that went on, and all the different crafts and barges which passed on the river. When you wished to go anywhere by water you had only to step down a narrow flight of stone stairs outside, get into a boat, and be rowed where you pleased, and this was a very pleasant way of travelling and cost little. At that time few lived at Wapping but sea-faring people, and those who owned great wharfs, and had to do with merchandise and shipping. My father was in the merchant service, well-known for his successful voyages, and always to be trusted to carry through a matter honourably and well. He was a man of his word, firm and true, and one who would look neither to right or left, but go straight on where his duty led. When you think of your great-grandfather, Susan, you can always feel proud of this; there is nothing better than to have had people belonging to us in the past who have been high-minded and good. He was, of course, often absent from us for months at a time, and had much to tell us about his voyages when he returned. He was the first to take out a gang of convicts in the ship *Scarborough*, and land them in the place which was afterwards called Botany Bay, then a wild and desolate country; this happened in the year 1788, when a new law was passed to establish a penal settlement in Australia with a governor at its head. Until then convicts had been sent to America and the West Indies. The account of this landing always interested me very much; but, on his second voyage to Australia, there happened to my father such a strange adventure, and such a narrow escape from a dreadful death that I never wearied of hearing about it, and it is now as fresh in my memory as if he had just told it to me. This is how it came to pass. It was in the spring of 1789, when he had been at home with us for a month, that he received orders to start for the colony with a second lot of 200 convicts, some to be taken on board at Woolwich, and some at Portsmouth; he was afterwards to proceed to China for a cargo of tea, and would therefore be away a long, long time. The whole household was sorry for this, because we all missed his cheerful companionship; but my mother grieved most of all,

for she understood better than we did, the dangers he would go through, and felt each time he left her, that she might never see him again. But she showed her trouble as little as she could until he was out of her sight, so that he might go on his way with a good heart, and not be too much cast down at leaving us alone.

"Well, he got down to Portsmouth, and the convicts came on board, looking at the first glance all very much alike, with their cropped heads and their prison clothes. But this was not really so, there was a great difference between them; for some were men of education and some were ignorant; some were brutal and wicked by nature, and others only weak and foolish; some were stupid, and others clever, and each of these things stamps its own expression on the face and form.

"As my father stood on the quay watching the men as they passed him, someone tapped him on the shoulder, and turning he saw a certain Major Grose standing there.

"'Captain Enticknapp,' he said; 'a word with you about one of those men. Notice the one standing fourth from us now; his name is Birt. I know him well and his father too. He can be trusted; it is misfortune rather than vice which has brought him to this evil pass. If you can, allow him some privileges, and show him kindness during the voyage. You will do me a service if you will bear this in mind.'

"Now my father was a man only too ready to think well of others, and to do them a kindness if possible, so he willingly promised, and observed Birt closely that he might know him again. He was a slight young fellow of about twenty, with delicate features and large melancholy eyes which he bent on the ground; so shame-faced and sad looking, and such a contrast in his bearing to the recklessness of many of the other men, that my father's heart was at once touched with pity for him.

"On the voyage he took every possible occasion of being kind to Birt, and allowed him the privilege of being on deck all day instead of only two hours like the rest of the convicts. He also lent him books, encouraged him to talk of his troubles, and by degrees learned the whole story of his misfortunes. Now, in doing this my father became fond of him, for to bestow benefits on anyone is a sure way to make a friendly feeling towards them, and as for Birt he would have done anything to serve the captain and show his gratitude. Very soon this chance was given to him.

"At night the convicts were all locked down under hatches and sentinels placed over them. The men lay six in a berth, and it so happened that one of these disclosed to Birt a plot that forty of them had made and signed with their blood. Would he join them and have his share of the prize?

"Now Birt dared not say no, for he feared for his life amongst those desperate men.

"'Before I say that I will,' he replied, 'I must know your plan. How is it possible to seize the ship when such a good look-out is kept?'

"Then the convict told him all that had been settled by the mutineers. At four o'clock when the hatches were raised most of the officers went to their cabins, and there would be more than twenty convicts on deck who were all in the plot. They would then knock down the sentinels, get possession of the quarter-deck, and seize the firearms which were ready loaded. They would next release their other comrades and alter the course of the ship.

"'But what,' asked Birt, 'will you do with the captain, officers, and soldiers?'

"'We will kill the captain,' replied the wretch, 'and put his head at the main topgallant masthead—and we will put the first-mate's head at the mizzen, and the boatswain's at the fore. The other convicts who are not with us in the matter we shall put on shore at some island, and leave them to shift for themselves, they are worth nothing. The ship is a good prize, for the captain has a large sum of money on board to take out for the East India Company. These things done, we shall kill the great hog, and with plenty of drink we shall have a good time of it. Do you join us?'

"Birt consented, for he dared not do otherwise; but all night long he thought, and thought, and wondered how to get the plot to the captain's knowledge. He was determined to save his life and that of the crew; but it was not an easy matter, for he knew that the convicts would now watch him narrowly and that he must not be seen talking to any of the officers. The only thing to do was to put it down in writing and get it somehow into their hands. But how to write it, when he was never a moment alone? and it must be done the next day.

"At last after much puzzling he hit upon a plan.

"In the morning when he went on deck he washed a shirt and took it up to the foretop to dry. Now the foretop is a place high up in the rigging of the ship, a very giddy height indeed, and when a man is there he is really almost out of sight and it is impossible to see what he is doing from the deck. Birt had a little pocket book with him, and in it, as he sat on the foretop, he wrote down all he knew about the intended mutiny. When he went below he hoped to get a chance of slipping it into the captain's hand, or of putting it where he would be likely to find it.

"But luck was against him, for he could not get near the captain the whole of that day, and there were keen eyes always fastened upon him by the convicts, who were on deck by fifty at a time, and watched each other closely for fear of treachery. Amongst each fifty there were always some who were in the plot, and if they had suspected Birt of betraying them they would have made short work of him, and this he knew very well. Evening came, and still he had been able to do nothing. The next morning at four o'clock the bloody deed was to be done. He paced the deck to and fro, to and fro, almost in despair, and yet determined to venture something for the captain's sake. Then he noticed that the first-mate was in the hold, serving out water, and suddenly an idea came into Birt's head. He pretended to stumble, threw himself right down the hatchway as though by accident, and fell a distance of sixteen feet into the hold. As you may imagine all was immediately stir and excitement, for at first they thought he was killed—and, indeed, he was badly bruised, having fallen on to a water-cask. In the bustle, however, he managed to slip the book into the mate's hand, and the thing was done. The surgeon was sent for and they got him up on deck, where, while his hurts were being looked to, he had the satisfaction of seeing the mate go aft and then into the captain's cabin.

"Promptly the soldiers were ordered up, but when the convicts on deck found their plot discovered they did not yield without a struggle. It was a short but a violent one, for in the confusion they got hold of some fire arms and fought desperately. The captain was twice wounded, and it was then that the old watch you see there had its share in saving his life. For the bullet, striking against the case and passing through it, was thus lessened in force, and did not reach a vital part of the body. It was, nevertheless, a serious hurt, and caused him much suffering, for it was some days before the bit of metal could be extracted from the wound.

"Meanwhile the convicts, being overpowered, were secured under hatches again, and the captain then made Birt point out the ringleaders and the most desperate of the men, which he did to the number of thirteen. These were placed in irons for the rest of the voyage, and when the vessel arrived at Port Jackson it was supposed they would have been hanged. But the governor declaring that it was not in his power to do so, they were registered to be kept in irons, chained two and two together, all their lives long.

"And thus this wicked plot was found out, and those wicked men punished, and thus it pleased Heaven to preserve your great-grandfather's life—first by reason of the gratitude and devotion of Mr Birt, and secondly through his stout old watch which did him good service and turned aside the enemy's bullet."

Aunt Hannah paused, and looked up at the picture again.

"But," said Susan, "what became of Mr Birt?"

"He was pardoned," replied my aunt, "on the representation of my father—because of the service he had rendered in saving the ship and crew at the risk of his own life."

"I'm glad of that," said Sophia Jane; "because it was so very good of him to tumble down the hatchway."

"He never returned to England," continued Aunt Hannah, "but settled in China, where I believe he prospered and became at last a rich man. My father often heard from him and always spoke of him with affection."

"That's a very nice story, indeed," said Susan. "I'm sorry it's over."

The account of the convicts' mutiny is taken from the Unpublished diary of Captain John Marshall, In command of the ship *Scarborough* at the time.

Chapter Eight.

Shrimps and Good-Byes.

Six months had passed. Susan's visit to Ramsgate was drawing to a close, for her mother had said in her last letter that she should soon be able to fix the day of her return. Six whole months! How long, how endless they had seemed to look forward to, but how very short they were to look back on. Susan could hardly believe they were really gone. She remembered well how desolate she had felt at first, how strange everything had been to her, and how she had longed to see a familiar face; but now, though of course it would be delightful to go home, there really were some things in Ramsgate she would be sorry to leave. One of these was the sea. It had almost frightened her at first, but now she had grown to love its changing face and voice, which were scarcely ever the same for two days together. For sometimes, sparkling with smiles, it would keep up a pleasant ripple of conversation, breaking now and again into laughter. At other times, darkly frowning, it would toss itself up and down in restless vexations, and hurl its waves on the shore with hoarse exclamations of anger. You could never be sure of it for long together, and in this it was strangely like the other thing which Susan felt she should miss—Sophia Jane. She and the sea were about equal in the uncertainty of their moods, for it must not be supposed that her nature was so changed by her illness that she became at once a good and agreeable little girl. This is not easy when one has become used for a long while to be tiresome and ill-tempered, for "habit," as Mrs Winslow had said, is a "giant power." The longer we have done wrong the more difficult it is to do right. And yet in some ways she was altered; she was not quite the same Sophia Jane who had said, "I like to vex 'em," six months ago.

Grateful for past kindness she now made many small efforts to please Aunt Hannah, and would even sometimes check herself when most irritated by Nanna's and Margaretta's reproofs. Naughty or good, she had now become such a close companion to Susan that any pleasure or amusement unshared by her would have been blank and dull. Now Susan knew what it was to have a companion she did not like to think of the time when she should learn lessons alone, and play alone, and have no one to talk over things with and make plans. Troubles were lessened and joys doubled by being shared, and when she thought of life at home without Sophia Jane she felt quite sad. At such moments she wondered whether her friend would be sorry too when the time came for them to part, and whether she really cared at all about her. It was difficult to find out, for Sophia Jane was not given to express herself affectionately, or to use terms of endearment to anyone. She had never been

accustomed to it. The two people to whom she showed most attachment were Monsieur La Roche and his sister, and even to these she was never what Mademoiselle called "expansive." Remembering this, Susan felt it was quite possible that Sophia Jane would see her depart with an unmoved face and no word of regret, and sometimes this made her unhappy. She would have given a good deal for a word of fondness from her once despised companion, but all her efforts to extract it were useless.

"Shall you be dull after I go away?" she would ask, and Sophia Jane would answer shortly:

"You're not going yet. What's the good of talking about it?"

A day was now drawing near in which both the little girls were much interested—Sophia Jane's birthday. Susan's present, prepared with much caution and secrecy, was quite ready, and put away in a drawer till the time came. She had bought the wax head out of Miss Powter's shop which Sophia Jane had admired long ago, and fixed it to the body of the old doll. Then little by little she had carefully made a complete set of clothing for it, after the pattern of those Grace wore, and Mademoiselle Delphine had added the promised grey silk bonnet to the costume. Altogether it made a substantial and handsome present, and Susan often went to look at it, and pictured to herself her companion's surprise and pleasure. And besides this there was something else to look forward to, for Aunt Hannah had promised that on this same occasion the children should go to Pegwell Bay and have shrimps for tea.

The Pegwell Bay shrimps were already famous in those days, and were considered far superior to any caught elsewhere; but the place itself had not yet become noisy and crowded as was the case in after years. It was still a quiet and beautiful little bay with only one countrified inn standing close to the shore. In the garden of this there were green arbours, or boxes, with neat tables and chairs, where you might sit at your ease, look out over the sea, watch the vessels sailing in the distance, and eat the dusky-brown shrimps for which Pegwell Bay was well-known. To these were added small new loaves of a peculiar shape, fresh butter, and tea. Nothing else could be had, but this simple fare was all very good of its kind, and to Susan and Sophia Jane it was more attractive than the finest banquet. And its attractions were increased by the fact that Aunt Hannah had given Sophia Jane leave to ask whom she chose to join her birthday party.

"Whom shall you ask?" said Susan as soon as they were alone after this permission.

"Only two people beside you," answered Sophia Jane immediately. "Monsieur La Roche and his sister."

"Oh!" exclaimed Susan. She paused a moment, for it seemed a bold stroke on Sophia Jane's part; then she added:

"I should like them to go very much; but sha'n't you ask anyone else? Not Margaretta and Nanna?"

"I don't mind *asking* them," said Sophia Jane, "because I know they won't come."

And she was quite right, for on hearing of who were to form Sophia Jane's party to Pegwell Bay, Nanna and Margaretta became very scornful.

"What a ridiculous party!" exclaimed Margaretta. "Now, if you were to ask the little Winslows and their governess, and Mr and Mrs Bevis and those nice-looking pupils, how much better it would be. Nanna and I would go with you then."

"*Of course*," added Nanna, "if you're going to have Monsieur and his sister, who always look such absurd objects, you *couldn't* ask any one else. But I call it very nonsensical. I wonder Aunt Hannah allows it?"

"Aunt said I might ask who I liked," replied Sophia Jane, "and I do like Monsieur and Mademoiselle, and I don't like the Winslows, and I can't bear Mr Bevis' pupils. You and Nanna may come if you like."

"We're much obliged to you," answered Margaretta with dignity, "but we greatly prefer staying at home."

So as Sophia Jane had said, there were only to be two guests beside Susan, for though Aunt Hannah was invited and made no objection at all to the party, she excused herself from joining it.

The invitation written and accepted, they had now only to wait till the time came, to wish heartily for a fine day, and to look forward to the event with an excitement quite unknown to those who have many pleasures. It seemed slow in coming, but it came. The weather was bright and cloudless, and nothing was wanting to their satisfaction. It is true Nanna and Margaretta still looked scornfully superior when the party was mentioned,

but that was not enough to spoil it, and both Susan and Sophia Jane set forth on their expedition with the lightest possible hearts, prepared for enjoyment.

Aunt Hannah was to take them to meet Monsieur and Mademoiselle at the place where the omnibus started for Pegwell Bay, and when they got within a short distance they could see that their punctual guests were already there waiting. They were both in the most cheerful spirits, and had attired themselves in a manner suitable to "le voyage." Monsieur, in particular, had cast aside his ordinary garments, and had now quite a marine and holiday air. He wore a white waistcoat and trousers rather shrunk, a sailor hat, and a short blue coat; slung round him by a bright new leather strap he carried a telescope in a neat case, with which to survey distant shipping, and in his hand a cane with a tassel. Mademoiselle on her side had not forgotten to do honour to the occasion by a freshly-trimmed bonnet, and a small bouquet of spring flowers in the front of her black dress.

After some delay—partly caused by Monsieur, who had many polite speeches to make, and stepped about in front of Aunt Hannah with repeated bows, and partly by Mademoiselle's extreme reluctance to getting on to the top of the omnibus—the start was really made. Susan drew a deep breath of delight, and thought it was the most beautiful drive she had ever had.

Their way, after they had rattled through the streets of the town, lay for some distance along a sandy road with woods on each side of it. The sea was hidden, but there were the fresh green buds on the trees to look at, and the blue sky overhead flecked with little white clouds, and the larks to listen to singing high up in the air over distant cornfields. By and by the road came out on the cliff again, and soon made a sudden dip so that the sea was now quite close to them, and on the other side another sea of freshly-springing wheat stretched away inland for miles. It was such a steep and stony hill that Mademoiselle began to be seized with panics of terror in case the horses should slip, so that she often clung tightly to Adolphe and cried, "Ciel!" This enlivened the journey a good deal, and she joined in laughing at herself with much good-nature, though it was really with a sigh of relief that she exclaimed, "Nous voici!" when the omnibus stopped at the door of the inn. It stood about half-way down the road leading to the shore, high enough to have a broad view over the sea, which was now at low tide. In the distance you could see the shrimpers slowly pushing their nets before them, and nearer on the rocks below the bent forms of

people gathering cockles; the grey gulls wheeled about overhead and poised themselves on their broad wings, or rode triumphantly on the gentle rippling of the water, and far far away on the edge of everything the shadowy sails of ships glided slowly past like ghosts. To these last Monsieur turned his attention, and having unstrapped his telescope took up a commanding position on a rising mound in the garden, and proceeded to sweep the horizon. Not with much success at first, but after it had been pointed out to him that he was looking at the wrong end he got on better, and Mademoiselle and the children leaving him thus employed strolled down to the shore until the tea should be ready. When there it was astonishing and delightful to discover Mademoiselle's extreme ignorance of marine objects. She had lived nearly all her life in Paris, she told them, and since she had been at Ramsgate had been too busy to go further than the town. It was most interesting, therefore, to search for curiosities, explain their habits to her and tell her their names, and she never failed to express the utmost wonder and admiration as each fresh one appeared. Even when Susan suddenly placed a star-fish on her lap as she sat gazing over the sea, and requested her to feel how flabby it was, she came bravely through the trial, though she inwardly regarded it with disgust and fear. Then with garments held tightly round her, and feverishly grasping her parasol, she was persuaded to venture on a little journey over the slippery rocks. Sophia Jane and Susan, on either hand, advised the safest places to tread on, watched each footstep carefully, and made encouraging remarks as though to a child. Finally, after many perils and narrow escapes, she was conducted with much applause safely back to the dry land, and up again to the inn garden.

Here they found Monsieur in a state of placid enjoyment expecting their return, and in a convenient arbour facing the sea the meal was ready prepared. Sophia Jane poured out the tea because it was her birthday, but not without difficulty, for the tea-pot was enormous, and her hands so small and weak, that she had to stand up and use her utmost strength. No one offered to help, however, for they well knew that it would have been considered an insult. Unlike some entertainments much looked forward to, Sophia Jane's party was a complete success. There were no disappointments at Pegwell Bay. Everything was good, everyone was merry, the shrimps more than came up to everyone's expectation.

The meal was nearly finished, and it was drawing near the time for the omnibus to start back to Ramsgate, when Mademoiselle suddenly drew a letter from her pocket.

"Stupid animal that I am!" she exclaimed, "I have till this moment forgotten to give you this, Adolphe. It arrived after you left this morning. My head is turned, it appears, by going to fêtes."

She smiled at the little girls as she handed the letter to her brother, and he put on his spectacles and opened it. Susan watched him. It was a thin foreign envelope, and the letter inside it was short, but it seemed to puzzle him a great deal. He held it out at arm's length, frowned at it, and gave it an impatient tap with one finger. Then he took off his glasses, rubbed them, put them on, and read it again, after which he rose suddenly, and leaning across the table, stretched the letter out to his sister, and said in a strange excited voice:

"Read Delphine—read, my sister."

Delphine was not long in doing so, one swift glance was enough, and next, to the children's surprise, she rushed from her place to Adolphe's side, threw her arms round his neck, kissed him a great many times, and burst into a torrent of tears. What could be the matter? What dreadful misfortune could have happened? Susan and Sophia Jane looked at each other in alarm. A moment before all had been happiness and gaiety, and now both Monsieur and his sister appeared to have lost all control over themselves, and were giving way to the most heartfelt distress. Some terrible news must have been contained in that letter. They stood at a little distance from the table, clasping each other's hands, uttering broken French sentences, and lifting their eyes to the sky, while tears rolled unrestrained down their faces. "If any one else saw them," said Susan to herself, "they would think they were mad," and she looked with some anxiety towards the inn door. There was no one in sight fortunately, and soon, a little subdued but still in a strange excited state, the brother and sister advanced hand in hand to the table. The odd part of it was that Mademoiselle was now actually laughing though her eyes were wet with tears.

"Forgive us, my children," she said, "it relieves the heart to weep. Trouble we have borne without complaint, but now joy comes, the tears come also. Adolphe, my brother, you are more able to speak. Tell them. I can no more."

She sunk down in a chair and covered her face with her hands.

Thus appealed to, Monsieur stood up at the end of the table facing the sea, like one prepared to make a speech, took off his sailor hat, and passed his hand thoughtfully over his closely-

cropped head. Susan and Sophia Jane, still puzzled and confused, stared up at him spellbound without saying a word, deeply impressed. For suddenly there seemed to be a change in Monsieur. He looked taller, and drew a deep breath like one who is relieved from some oppression. It was as though a burden had dropped from his shoulders, and set him free to stand quite upright at last.

His grey eyes, though red with weeping, had a light in them now of hope and courage, and he fixed them on the distance as though he were talking to someone far away across the sea in his native country.

"My children," he said, "my sister has told you that we have borne our troubles without complaint, and that is true. But they have been hard troubles. Not only often to be hungry and very weary in the body—that is bad, but there is worse. It is a sore thing to be hungry in the mind and grieved in the spirit. To leave one's real work undone, so that one may earn something to eat and drink, to have no outlet for one's thoughts, to lose the conversation and sympathy of literary men. That is a bondage and a slavery, and that is what a man who is very poor must do. He must leave his best part unused, wasted, unknown. He is bound and fettered as though with iron. But that is now past. To-day we hear that we are no longer poor people. This letter tells me that I am now a rich man. Free. Free to go back to Paris to take up again my neglected work, to see my sister's adorable patience rewarded by a life of ease and leisure—to see again my friends—"

Monsieur stopped suddenly, and Mademoiselle, clasping his hand, immediately rushed in with a mixture of French and English.

"Oh, Adolphe! Adolphe! it is too much. Figure it all to yourself! The Champs Elysées, and the Bois, and the toilettes and the sunshine. To dine at Phillippe's perhaps, and go the theatre, and to hear French words, and see French faces, and taste a French cuisine again. Nothing more English at all! No more cold looks and cold skies—"

"Calm yourself, Delphine, my sister," said Monsieur, "we forget our little friends here."

"It is true," said Mademoiselle wiping her eyes with her pocket-handkerchief, and glancing at the children's upturned astonished faces, "I am too much exalted. I will restrain myself. Voyons petites amies," she continued, sitting down between

them, "it is this which has so much moved us. It is that a magnificent, yes, a magnificent fortune comes to my brother by the death of his cousin. It is a little sudden at first, but," drawing herself up with dignity, "he will adorn the position, and we shall now resume the 'De' in our name, for our family is an ancient one."

"Shall you go away?" asked Sophia Jane.

"Assuredly. My brother," looking with much admiration at Adolphe, "will now have large and important affairs to conduct in Paris."

"I am sorry," said Sophia Jane dejectedly.

Mademoiselle kissed her and Susan with much affection.

"If the sky is cold and grey here in England, we have also found good and warm hearts," she said, "which we shall never forget. It is Gambetta with his little tinkling bell who will remind us of some of them."

But Sophia Jane still looked grave. It was difficult to be glad that Monsieur and his sister were going away, and Susan's spirits were also more sober, though it was a relief to find that the letter had contained good news. A quietness had indeed fallen upon the whole party, for Adolphe, now that the first excitement was over, sat silently musing with his gaze fixed dreamily on the distance. Even for Mademoiselle it was almost impossible to keep on talking all alone, and her remarks gradually became fewer until the start homewards was made. Then the movement and the chill evening air seemed to restore her usual briskness, and she proceeded to describe to the children the exact situation of the "appartement" which she and Adolphe would occupy on their return to Paris, and make many brilliant plans for the future. As they entered the town, observing that her brother still remained silent and thoughtful, she touched him gently on the knee.

"A quoi pense tu, mon frère?" she asked.

"Of many things, my sister," he replied in French; "and amongst them, of how we shall best recompense the brave Madame Jones."

Buskin was waiting to take the little girls home, and looked on with severity at Monsieur's parting bows and graceful wavings of the sailor hat.

"Make my compliments to Madame, your aunt," said Delphine to Susan, "and say that I shall wait on her to-morrow."

So Sophia Jane's party to Pegwell Bay was over, and all that remained was to repeat the wonderful news of Monsieur's fortune at Belmont Cottage. It was received with enough excitement and interest to be quite satisfactory, and to be sufficient reason for sitting up much later than usual. There were many questions to answer from everyone, and Nanna and Margaretta appeared to find the smallest details welcome. "How did Monsieur look when he opened the letter? What did he say? What did Mademoiselle say? How large was the fortune? What was the cousin's name who left it to him?"

"They're an ancient family," said Sophia Jane, "and you must be sure to call them *De La Roche* now."

"I always thought," said Margaretta, "that there was something gentlemanly about Monsieur. Odd, you know, but not common."

"Oh, certainly not common!" replied Nanna.

It seemed strange to Susan to hear that, for she remembered how they had both thought it impossible to invite anyone to meet him at Pegwell Bay.

She was still occupied with wondering about this when the evening post came in. There was a letter for Aunt Hannah, and when she had read it she looked over her glasses at Susan.

"Dear me!" she said. "This is sudden news indeed. Your mother writes from London, my dear, where she arrived yesterday."

"Am I to go home?" said Susan, getting up from her chair as though ready to start at once.

"Nurse is to fetch you the day after to-morrow," said Aunt Hannah, looking at the letter again. "Are you in such a great hurry to leave us that you cannot wait till then?"

Susan had grown fond of Aunt Hannah, and did not wish to seem ungrateful. She went and stood by her chair and said earnestly:

"I'm very sorry to go away. I am, indeed; but, of course, I want to see Mother."

As she spoke she gave a glance at Sophia Jane. "Did she mind? Was she sorry now that the time had come?"

If she were she gave no sign of it. Her face expressed neither surprise, or interest, or sorrow, but was bent closely over some shells she had brought from Pegwell Bay.

"We shall all miss our little Susan," continued Aunt Hannah, kissing her affectionately.

"That we shall," said Nanna.

"Dear, good little thing!" said Margaretta.

Surely Sophia Jane would say something too. No. She went on arranging her shells in small heaps, and took no manner of notice.

"And as for Sophia Jane," continued Aunt Hannah, "she will be completely lost without her companion."

Susan looked entreatingly at her friend, longing for a word or look of affection, but not a muscle of the small face moved; it might have been made of stone.

"Won't you be sorry to lose Susan, my dear?" asked Aunt Hannah.

"I suppose so," was all the answer, with an impatient jerk of the shoulders.

Susan was so hurt at this coldness that she went to bed in low spirits, and thought of it sorrowfully for a long while before she slept. It cast a gloom over the prospect even of going home to think that Sophia Jane did not love her.

She had evidently not forgotten Susan's behaviour in the past, and did not wish to have her for a friend. It was the more distressing because Susan had made a plan which she thought a very pleasant one, and was anxious to carry out. It was to ask her mother to allow her to have Sophia Jane on a visit in London. She would then be able to show her many things and places she had never seen, and enjoy her enjoyment and surprise. The Tower, the Zoological Gardens, Astley's, Westminster Abbey, Saint Paul's, and all the wonders and delights of town. It was a beautiful idea, but if Sophia Jane held aloof in this way it must be given up. And yet it was a most puzzling thing to account for this chilling behaviour, because

lately she had been more kind and pleasant than usual, and sometimes almost affectionate. It was useless, however, as Susan now knew, to wonder about Sophia Jane's moods. They came and they went, and it was, after all, just possible that she would be quite different in the morning.

When the next day came she got up with a feeling that she had a great deal on her hands, for it was her last day at Ramsgate, and she must say good-bye to everyone and let them know she was going away. At breakfast-time something was said about going to make a farewell visit to the Winslows, but Susan thought there were more important matters to be done first.

"I'll go if I've time," she said seriously; "but you see I have a great deal to do, because this is my last day."

Her round of acquaintances was not large, but the people who formed it lived at long distances from each other, so that it took up a good deal of time to see them all. There was the periwinkle woman, who sat at the corner of Aunt Hannah's road; there was the donkey and bath-chair man, and a favourite white donkey; there was Billy Stokes, the sweetmeat man; and Miss Powter, who kept the toy-shop. There was also a certain wrinkled, old Cap'en Jemmy, who walked up and down the parade with a telescope under his arm and said, "A boat yer honour!" to passers-by.

The children had made these acquaintances in their daily walks, and were on friendly terms with them all; so that Susan was not satisfied till she had found each of them and gone through the same form of farewell.

"Good morning!" she said. "I've come to say good-bye, because I'm going home to-morrow."

None of them seemed so much surprised and interested to hear this as she had hoped. They took it with a calm cheerfulness, which was rather disappointing, for it seemed that her departure would not make much difference to anyone in Ramsgate. It was a little depressing. There were now only two more good-byes to be said, and they were to Monsieur and Mademoiselle De La Roche, who arrived in the afternoon and stayed some time receiving congratulations, and talking over the wonderful change in their fortunes with Aunt Hannah. Compared to this, Susan's going away seemed a very insignificant thing, and though they were both kind, and Mademoiselle invited her to stay some day with her in Paris, she did not feel that it made much impression on them; they soon

began to talk again of their own affairs. Susan felt disappointed. She would have liked someone to be very sorry indeed that she was going away from Ramsgate, and, after the visitors had left, she looked round for Sophia Jane, with a lingering hope that she might be in a softer frame of mind. She was not in the room, and Susan hesitated. Should she go and find her, and risk the rebuff which was nearly sure to come, or should she leave her alone? This would be the only chance. To-morrow, in the bustle and hurry of preparation, they would not be a moment alone. She stood considering, and then the desire for sympathy was too strong to be restrained, and she took her way slowly towards the attic. She felt no doubt that Sophia Jane was there, but on the threshold of the half-open door she stopped a minute to get courage, for she was very uncertain as to how she might be received. Perhaps her companion might be angry at being followed. Presently as she stood there she heard a little gasping noise. She listened attentively; it was like someone crying, and struggling to keep it from being heard. Could it be Sophia Jane, and was she really sorry? Much encouraged by the idea Susan hesitated no longer, but marched boldly in. There was Sophia Jane lying flat on the big black box, face downwards, her little frame shaken with stormy sobs, which she tried in vain to control. As Susan entered she raised her head for an instant, and then turned from her to the wall.

Susan perched herself on the end of the box and sat silent for a moment before she said gently:

"What's the matter?"

"Go away!" sobbed Sophia Jane. "I'm very poorly. My head aches."

"Let me put wet rags on it," said Susan eagerly. "I've done it often for Freddie. I'll fetch Aunt Hannah's eau de Cologne. It'll soon make it better."

Sophia Jane turned her head round from the wall and fixed two inflamed blue eyes upon her companion.

"I'm not crying," she said, "but I'm very poorly. The sun made my eyes water when we were out this afternoon, and my head aches."

"I'll soon do it good," said Susan.

She jumped off the box and ran down-stairs, quickly returning with some eau de Cologne mixed with water in a tumbler, and a clean pocket-handkerchief.

Sophia Jane was quieter now, and lay watching her preparations with some satisfaction, though her chest heaved now and then, and she blinked her red eyelids as though the light hurt them. When the cool bandage was put on her forehead she gave a sigh of comfort, and rested her head on Susan's lap as she sat behind her on the edge of the box.

"I'll tell you something," she said presently.

"I *was* crying. I'm dreadfully, dreadfully sorry you're going away."

"I'm glad you're sorry," said Susan, "because I was afraid you didn't mind."

"Everyone's going away but me," went on Sophia Jane. "Monsieur and Mademoiselle and Gambetta and you. Everyone I like. There's no one left. I don't think I can bear it. What shall I do?"

A tear rolled from under the bandage.

"There'll be Aunt Hannah," said Susan.

"I only like her pretty well," said Sophia Jane. "I could easily do without her. I used not to like anyone at all; but now I do, they're all going away."

"Well," said Susan, casting about in her mind for some crumb of comfort, "I shall write to you when I get home, and tell you everything once every week, and you must write to me."

"You'll forget," said Sophia Jane in a miserable voice.

"I *never* forget," answered Susan firmly. "And then there's another thing—I mean to ask Mother to ask you to come and stay with me. Wouldn't that be fun? Just think of all the things we could do!"

"Do you think she would?" asked Sophia Jane.

She started up so suddenly to look at Susan that the bandage fell over one eye. A little quivering smile appeared round her mouth.

"I *think* so," said Susan with caution, "if I wanted it very much."

"And *do* you?"

"I'm *sure* I do," replied Susan earnestly, and she ventured to kiss the cheek nearest her, wet with tears and eau de Cologne.

It had been Sophia Jane's custom on such occasions, either to rub off the kiss impatiently or to make a face expressing disgust. This time she did neither; she laid her head down again in Susan's lap and said quietly:

"I like you very much."

The words of affection she had wished for had come at last, and few though they were, Susan liked them better than any she had heard since she had been in Ramsgate. And, indeed, they were worth more than many caressing speeches from some people, for Sophia Jane never said more than she meant. Susan felt quite proud and satisfied, now that she knew Sophia Jane really liked her.

And so, on the morrow, when the time really came to say good-bye to Belmont Cottage and everyone in it, it was a comfort to think that perhaps she should soon see her companion again. It was, indeed, the only thing that kept up her spirits at all as she drove away with Nurse, and left the little group gathered round the gate. Aunt Hannah, Nanna, and Margaretta, even the stiff Buskin, had all come out to see the "last of Susan" and wave their farewells, but the person she was most sorry to leave was the once despised Sophia Jane.

Thus they parted; Susan to go back to the busy murmur of the London streets, Sophia Jane to remain within sound of the great sea. Would they meet again? Perhaps, at some future time, they would, but whether they did or not, they had taught each other certain lessons at Ramsgate which it is possible for us all to learn. Only we must open our eyes and take the trouble to study them, for though they lie close round about us we cannot always see them, because we are blinded by pride and vanity, and despise or lightly esteem the very people who could teach them. Then we miss them altogether; and that is a great pity, for they are the best things we can learn in life—Lessons of Self-sacrifice, Humility, and Love.

The End.
